

IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

**How The Church Is Directed By The
Good News**

TOM BARNES

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To Gary V. Smith

A friend and mentor who has taught me by
example what it looks like to be a scholar with the
heart of a pastor and a passion for God.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine this scene: Two leaders within the church are standing toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose in front of a crowd of people. These men are not just any two leaders either. They are two of the most prominent in all history, central figures in the New Testament. What would lead two apostles, Paul and Peter, to such a stand off?

In the process of demonstrating the gospel he preached was not received “from man,” but “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12), Paul drives home the point he did not even receive this good news from other apostles. The incident between Paul and Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) is recounted as part of that larger purpose in the letter.

For a time the two men were together in Syrian Antioch (Gal. 2:11), an influential Roman city that also served as an early center for Christians. Before the arrival of men from Jerusalem who advocated a necessary return for Christians to certain Old Testament laws such as circumcision and regulations for ceremonial cleanliness, Peter fully demonstrated love for and unity with the Gentile believers in Antioch.¹ Yet, once they arrived, he ceased such fellowship because he feared what these newcomers would think (Gal. 2:12). So influential was Peter that he led others astray into hypocrisy, not the least of which was Barnabas (Gal. 2:13), one of the first Christians courageous enough to embrace the former persecutor, Paul (Acts 9:27). Paul’s response was to confront Peter for requiring Gentile believers to conform to Old Testament laws to which he, a Jew, did not even fully conform (Gal. 2:14).

Though the main point Paul had for writing of this clash was to show the Galatian saints that he was not dependent upon any other man for the gospel that Jesus revealed to him, we also learn a great deal about inappropriate behavior for followers of Jesus Christ.

Actions that are motivated by fear of others and what they think, those that are inconsistent with who a person really is and are only putting on an outward show to impress, those that cause other persons to stray away from Christ-like, Christ-dependence, and those that are not in keeping with love for others are all sin and worthy of confrontation.

Yet, getting more to the heart of the matter, notice how Paul describes these sins: “their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14). What is this gospel with which they were out of step? Paul’s most succinct explanation comes from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” In other words, the gospel is what God has done in Jesus Christ to save sinners.²

Perhaps a more word-for-word translation will help us grasp the sense of this confrontation more fully. Paul writes: “They do not walk straight toward the truth of the gospel.” (author’s own translation) Though Paul tells of an event from the past, he words it vividly, in the present tense, as if in his mind he is putting himself back in the situation. The word translated “walk straight”³ is found nowhere else in the New Testament or other Greek literature. It may be an example of Paul’s knack for crafting compound words to get across his point. Here he is relying on the picture of a person walking toward a desired destination. Since the person is heading toward that specific point, there is a

necessary path they must follow. Yet, they are not walking toward or along the road that leads to their objective.

What Paul says about these wayward brothers is that they are not walking straight toward truth that emerges from the gospel. If Paul lived in our own day and time, he might say it something like this: “Peter, you are not following the directions that the GPS of the gospel is setting forth for our life path that leads to the destination of the glory of God’s grace.”

Paul’s commentary on the behavior of Peter and the other straying saints in Antioch accurately describes many Christians today. We come to Christ by embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which “is...good news: the best and most important news that any human being ever hears.”⁴ As such, we are united to Christ (Rom. 6:1-11), empowered and directed by him to live to the glory of God (John 15:1-17). From this gospel reality a light, a body of truth is emitted, that shows us how we should love and serve our Lord, as well as others. This light also shows us we have been empowered to this same end. So, from Gal. 2:14 we should see that “the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life-- spiritual, psychological, corporate, social--by thinking, hoping, and living out the ‘lines’ or ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving.”⁵ Yet, most of us do not grasp these realities. We do not rightly see that the gospel should direct all of life, so we are often out-of-step with it. As author Jerry Bridges has put it:

Evangelicals commonly think today that the gospel is only for unbelievers. Once we're inside the kingdom's door, we need the gospel only in order to share it with those who are still outside. Now, as believers, we need to hear the message of discipleship. We need to learn how to live the Christian life and be challenged to go do it. That's what I believed and practiced in my life and ministry for some time. It is what most Christians seem to believe.

As I see it, the Christian community is largely a performance-based culture today. And the more deeply committed we are to following Jesus, the more deeply ingrained the performance mindset is. We think we earn God's blessing or forfeit it by how well we live the Christian life.⁶

When we are in step with or directed by the gospel, we will be: Christ-dependent, not self-dependent; Christ-exalting, not self-exalting; sacrificially others-serving, not self-protecting; humbly admitting of our sin, not proudly hiding our weaknesses; trusting in God's Spirit to work through God's Word to change lives, not in our own creative genius; given to much prayer, not swamped by workaholism; aware we need each other in the church, not content to be a "Lone-Ranger;" and we will be fruit-bearing lovers of God and others (even those much different), not barren self-servers.

If we stop and think about it, the central place the gospel plays in following Christ should not surprise us. After all, our ultimate purpose is to glorify God (Mat. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phi. 2:14-15) and God is glorified through the display of the grace of his gospel in his people. We see this in Eph. 1:4-6: "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." Here we discover God chose and predestined his people to be adopted as his children so they could be a holy and blameless people and this was all so that his grace, that which shows forth the full weight of what he is like, could be praised. In fact, this grace "with which he graced us in the beloved" (v. 6, author's own translation) is so much at the core of God's glory that in two following parallel statements (Eph. 1:12, 14) when Paul speaks of the ultimate purpose of God's saving work, it is simply stated that it is "to the praise of his glory". To praise God's glory is the same as praising his glorious grace since God's grace in Christ (the essence of the gospel) is so much at the core of God's glory.

Since the gospel is so central to the Christian and his living out of God's purpose, there are two truths that follow for the Church, ones we will explore in this book. First, as we have just suggested, the gospel is for believers, not only for the unsaved. Tim Keller has memorably said it this way:

We never "get beyond the gospel" in our Christian life to something more "advanced". The gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths, rather, it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.⁷

We will discover how it is that this good news applies to the saint for life and what it looks like for the Church to be directed by it in all she does.

Second and more to the point, we will discover, as Paul writes in Romans 16:25, that God strengthens us "according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ". It is by the truth of the gospel, as well as the power God exercises through it, that we progress in our walk with Jesus Christ. This is true for the saint as long as he lives.

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus Christ, the righteous one, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation, but everlasting joy, for those who trust him. You never, never, never outgrow your need for this gospel. You don't begin the Christian life with this and then leave it behind and get stronger with something else. God strengthens us with the gospel to the day we die.⁸

So, we will discover what it looks like for the Church to be directed by the gospel, for Christians to do life, carry out ministry together, and to be strengthened by the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Part One we will lay the biblical foundation in two ways. First, we will look in great detail at the clearest statement in all the Scriptures of just how the gospel shapes the Christian life: Titus 2:11-15 (Chapters 1-2). Next, we will discover that this saint-strengthening, life-shaping gospel is at the heart of the entire teaching of the Bible (Chapters 3-4).

In Part Two we will see how the gospel should drive and shape various aspects of the Church such as: Evangelism (Chapters 5-6), how Christians change and grow in Christ-likeness (Chapter 7), the ministry of the Word (Chapter 8), how a congregation operates and does life together (Chapter 9), and finally how the Church engages in ministries of mercy, both on the personal level and in the public square (Chapters 10-11).

My prayer is that this book will lead you, your family, and your congregation to walk in step with the gospel!

Tom Barnes

Minden, Ne., USA

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PART ONE
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

GOSPEL-DIRECTED TRANSFORMATION, PART 1 (TITUS 2:11-12)

The aroma of the gospel should hang upon all a church does no less than the smell of smoke clings to a fire fighter returning from a fire. That is the message you will take from this book. Yet, we do not merely want to assume the gospel must be so integral to all we are and do. We want to make sure this is what the Bible teaches. And if it does, we want to find out just what it means for the gospel to inform, empower, undergird, permeate, and serve as a foundation for all of life and ministry.

I am convinced there is no better place in the Scriptures to take up this task than Titus 2:11-15. If Romans 3:21-26 is the most important paragraph in the Bible, as some have asserted,⁹ because it so clearly explains why the death of Christ is necessary and what it accomplishes, Titus 2:11-15 runs a close second for it shows us with equal clarity the power that same gospel has to transform. In other words, it shows both that and how the gospel undergirds for Christian holiness, family life, work, missions, discipleship, mercy ministry, public square involvement, and pastoral ministry.

In this chapter we will explore Titus 2:11-12. Then, in Chapter 2 we will look at Titus 2:13-15.

The Purpose And Structure Of Titus

Paul wrote this letter to Titus to encourage him with the reality the church in Crete needed to be instructed in how to live out their faith more consistently and with greater holiness.¹⁰ After Paul and Titus completed the initial phase of their ministry on this island, “Titus has been left behind to complete the work of establishing the new believers

in well-functioning churches (1:5).”¹¹ So, “Paul...lays out the key issues that need to be addressed in order for these new churches to be healthy and vibrant.”¹²

There are three primary subjects Paul addresses. First, he gives Titus instructions for the establishment of the church, such as setting forth qualifications for elders (1:5-9). Second, Paul gives direction for dealing with false teachers who were present among the Cretan saints (1:10-16). Third, he writes to help Titus address the ungodly, undisciplined beliefs and behavior rampant among the congregation (1:12-13; 2:1). It is this third subject which takes up the bulk of the letter. In fact, chapters 2-3 are devoted to promoting sound teaching and godliness by making three points that are repeated in typical Hebrew fashion:

1. *A call to sound ethical behavior. 2:1-10*
2. *The gospel foundation undergirding the sound behavior. 2:11-14*
3. *Summary: Declare these things. 2:15*
1. *A call to sound ethical behavior. 3:1-2*
2. *The gospel foundation undergirding the sound behavior. 3:3-8a*
3. *Summary: Insist on these things. 3:8b-d*¹³

When we look at this structure what we find is that the church in Crete was confronted by both false teaching as well as an immoral culture, which together put strong pressure on these believers to compromise on both doctrine and lifestyle. In the main body of the letter (1:5-3:14) what we find is Paul calling the Cretan church to strong holy living based upon and flowing out of strong doctrine (centering on the gospel) and he calls Titus to declare these things to the saints there (2:15; 3:8b-d).

The Gospel Impact Of 2:11-12

The word “for” in 2:11 introduces the reason why the ethical exhortations of 2:1-10 should and can be done. Titus can call the believers to God-honoring, people-benefiting actions because “the grace of God has appeared” (literally, this unmerited favor “was caused to appear”). The parallel statement in 3:4-6 clarifies that God the Father is behind the sending of this grace and it is embodied in the Son, Jesus Christ: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior....” So, what Paul is teaching is that righteous practice and obedience flow out of the saving work of Jesus Christ accomplished in behalf of and applied to the people of God. In other words, it flows out of the gospel.

One of the first things we learn, then, about the gospel is that it glorifies God, showing he is the giver and the doer, we are the recipients (Eph. 2:1-10). He is the Great Physician, we are the patients (Mt. 9:12). This is why Paul writes in Eph. 1:6, 12, 14 that the way God saves us results in his grace being praised. We must go through life with hands outstretched toward God—to receive from him, not to give to him (Mt. 7:7-11; Acts 17:25). Does this attitude mark you? Do you understand that we must abide moment by moment in Jesus Christ—trusting him and his Word, dependent upon him—to bear the kind of fruit God desires for us, since apart from him we can do nothing of eternal significance, nothing for his glory (John 15:5)?

Titus 2:11-12 Speaks Of The Gospel

That we have explained accurately how this grace has come (arising from the gospel) is supported in the next clause: “bringing salvation for all men”. The word “salvation” is used only here and one other time by Paul (Ephesians 6:17)¹⁴ and is related to the verb “save,” which Paul uses to speak of the entire act of God whereby he gives new life, declares sinners righteous in Christ, forgives, sets apart as holy, preserves, and glorifies (e.g. Ephesians 2:5; 1 Timothy 1:15). It particularly focuses upon God’s deliverance of man from sin and divine wrath.¹⁵

Before we progress, we must note Paul teaches here that a gospel-directed life demands living under and in this salvation! No saint will progress far in his walk with Christ unless he learns to think much on salvation: How we are saved, how this salvation shapes daily existence, what promises are brought to us because of salvation, and how we find great comfort in that salvation. In so many ways the Bible revolves around this very message, namely, why we need salvation, how our glorious merciful God has saved us in Jesus Christ, and the ways in which this transforms us! O, Christian, learn to love salvation and to use it as a door into your love for and worship of God.

Paul heightens the connection between divine grace and salvation in this clause in that he does not include a verb. Literally Titus 2:11 reads, “For the grace of God was caused to appear, salvation unto all men.” (Author’s own translation) This grace leads to and it results in salvation. It is similar to saying, “The rains came; everything’s wet!” Praise God that he saves sinners! “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” (1 Tim. 1:15)

The Gospel Applied To Us Leads To Transformation

Since salvation for Paul includes the idea of sanctification and perseverance,¹⁶ we should not be surprised to find out that the grace which results in salvation is also “training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:12). The verb for “train” can speak of teaching, tutoring, training, correcting, or disciplining. In this particular context the most likely connotation is that God’s unmerited favor corrects and teaches us in such a way that we have the desire to do what he wants of us and we have the ability to do what pleases him.

This is a very important verse since it highlights what is taught throughout the New Testament, namely that God’s grace not only forgives, it also transforms us to be godly, Christ-like people who can and do serve God to his glory (see also 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 3:5-6; 8:1; 9:8; Ephesians 4:7; Colossians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:1). This is why the New Testament can teach both that salvation is a free gift that is not earned by us (Eph. 2:8-9), but at the same time unless there is holiness, we will not see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). The saving work of God not only forgives us and gives us eternal life, it also brings Christ-like change. The end result is to give us great confidence we can carry out God’s commands. The end result is also to move us to gratitude: All we have, all we ever will have, all we are, all we ever will be—it all is because of God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ!

The end result also should be to move us to joy as we see how sweet and pleasurable is the wisdom of God that leads us in such a good and glorious way. What we see here in Titus 2:11-12 proves the reality of Proverbs 24:13-14: “My son, eat honey, for it is good,

and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.¹⁴ Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.” God not only shows us the sweeter, more pleasurable way, he transforms us into people who can and want to go that direction!¹⁷

How The Gospel Results In Transformation

This transformation takes place, as we see in the parallel statement in Titus 3:5-6, “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” The context demands that the “washing” is “the spiritual cleansing, which is outwardly symbolized in baptism.”¹⁸ This spiritual cleansing comes from “regeneration” (lit. “new birth”), a term used only twice in the New Testament: here and in Matthew 19:28 (where it refers to the coming new world or age). Though the term behind “regeneration” does not occur in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it is used by the Jewish philosopher Philo to refer to the renewal of the world after the flood and also to the renewal of individuals. The first century historian, Josephus, uses the term to speak of “the revival of Israelite national life after the exile”.¹⁹ In classical Greek literature it is used in mythological works to speak of the rebirth of souls.²⁰ Paul is saying that our cleansing and forgiveness come from the Spirit of God making us a new person, a work which can take place because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin in his flesh upon the cross (Rom. 8:1-3).

Not only does Paul write that our cleansing comes from rebirth or regeneration (the making of a new person), but also from “renewal” (Titus 3:5). This word is used only here and in Romans 12:2 where Paul exhorts us not to be conformed to the world, but instead to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind”. In that context Paul is speaking

of changing our thinking based upon the gospel so that we have a new way of looking at things. In Titus 3:5 we discover we are made new people by the Holy Spirit. Both the regeneration and the renewal, Paul says, flow from the Holy Spirit. Most likely Paul does not intend much difference between “regeneration” and “renewal”. He used the two terms to heighten and emphasize further the change accomplished in the saint by the Holy Spirit. If any distinction between the terms is intended it would be that “regeneration” speaks of being made a new person and “renewal” the new way of thinking and looking at things that results.

As we continue to look at the parallel passage in Titus 3, we find out Paul says the Father poured out richly upon us the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:6). The thought flow is that the regeneration and renewal come to us from the Holy Spirit’s work in us and we have the Holy Spirit richly poured out upon us because of the saving work of Jesus Christ. We need to explore how this happens.

Because the Father chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) which means that God’s sovereign choice of us to save us would involve uniting us to Christ’s death and resurrection (which would remove the enemy status between the Father and us, Romans 5:10), the Father works by the Spirit upon his elect in view of the death and resurrection of Christ in behalf of them so that the eyes of their heart are opened up for them to see their need for Christ and so that they can trust in him (John 3:3; Acts 16:14; Ephesians 2:4) after hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17), which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Once we have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, the Spirit is poured out richly upon us and indwells us (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit’s greater, deeper, more permanent work in believers, as part of the New Covenant

(Ezekiel 36:26-27; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:1-13), which was made possible for us by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (John 16:4b-11; Ephesians 4:8), is the source of all the good things which God gives to his people (compare Matthew 7:11 with Luke 11:13).

United to Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ applied to us through his priestly intercession (Rom. 8:43; Heb. 7:25) and by the Spirit's work (1 Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5-6), it is no surprise that we are "a new creation [and] the old has passed away; behold the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). It is no surprise we are set apart, we are sanctified to become more like Jesus Christ and to follow God's will since an important work of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify us (Romans 8:1-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16-18).

The reality that true salvation leads to a change which involves new desire (Philippians 2:13) and empowerment (2 Cor. 9:8), stands behind the New Testament theme that a new life becomes the indicator of the presence of salvation (cf. Galatians 5:19-22) and that the lack of change becomes an indicator that one is still lost (1 Cor. 6:9-10). It also stands behind Paul's thought flow in Titus 2 and Titus 3. The gospel transformation which takes place in all saints works in them to give the desire and the empowerment to carry out the will of God to his glory.

Put another way, the death of Christ and his resurrection open the way for the Spirit of God to be poured out upon us, transforming us from the inside out—giving us the desire to get in the game of living for God's glory and training us to that very end. At the same time, though he empowers, changes, and trains all along the way, we must also use the

other resources given to us (The Word, prayer, the Church) to grow and we must also go out on the field and “play the game” in his power.²¹

Each true saint goes from a person who does not want to be in the game, cares nothing for the team, and has no ability, to a person who has the desire, the ability, and is out on the field playing—serving God and living a godly life! We must train our self unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), yet we can only do this because the Spirit is changing and training us to do that very thing!

What Transformation The Gospel Brings

God works in us to renounce two things: “ungodliness and worldly passions”. The word translated “renounce” is used in Titus 1:16 to speak of those who claim to know God, yet in their works show they have rejected him, they have denied him. To “renounce” ungodliness and worldly passions is to reject them; to refuse to remain in the state of such thinking and behavior.²²

From Ungodliness To Godly Living

Take another look at what Paul wrote here in Titus 2:11-12: “The Grace of God has appeared...training us to renounce ungodliness...and to live...godly lives...”

“Ungodliness” translates the Greek word *asebeia*, the opposite of “godly” (*eusebia*) later in the verse. “The root *seb-* meant originally to step back from someone or something, to maintain a distance. From this spatial meaning...there developed the metaphorical idea of trepidation ranging from shame, through wonder, to something approaching fear.”²³

Though the word group is used only rarely in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), it usually renders the Hebrew *yare*, “to fear”. The negative adverb

“ungodly,” *asebēs* (the *a* prefix means “no”), is often paired with “unrighteous” in the Septuagint and focuses upon sinful actions and attitudes, which arise from lack of fear of God.²⁴ By the last half of the first century A.D. “godliness” and related terms were used to speak of attitudes and actions that flow from fear of or reverence for God and show a devotion to him.²⁵

Godliness involves holiness (2 Peter 3:11) and is marked by: contentment (1 Tim. 6:6); love for God, love for others, humility, obedience to God, thankfulness, and self-control (2 Timothy 3:1-5).²⁶ Godliness cannot be produced by self, but is the outcome of the work of Jesus Christ, the gospel, in us (1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3), and is only lived out because saints are united to Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:12). As such, godliness will not be the source of the true work of God, but will be an outcome of it (Acts 3:12). Though godliness is an outcome of the gospel and God’s divine power in us, nevertheless, to live it out, we must pursue it (1 Tim. 6:11), discipline our self toward it (1 Timothy 4:7), and thus make every effort to be godly (2 Peter 1:6-7). Finally, godliness is no small matter. We are called to pursue it (1 Tim. 6:11), to make every effort to add it to our life (2 Peter 1:6-7), told that our teaching content and approach must measure up to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 1:1), to pray for it (1 Tim. 2:2), and promised that there is great gain in godliness with contentment (1 Tim. 6:6).²⁷

Given the groundwork we just laid, godliness can be defined as “a loving but reverent awe of God.”²⁸ Along this line, Jerry Bridges offers a very helpful more specific definition of “godliness”:

The New Testament word for godliness, in its original meaning, conveys the idea of a personal attitude toward God that results in actions that are pleasing to God. This personal attitude toward God is what we call devotion to God. But it is always devotion in action. It is not just a warm, emotional feeling about God, the kind of feeling we may get while singing some grand old hymn of praise or some modern-day chorus of worship.... [Yet] devotion is not an activity;

*it is an attitude toward God. This attitude is composed of three essential elements: The fear of God; the love of God; the desire for God.*²⁹

The Puritan William Law furthers our understanding of this reverential devotion when he writes:

*Devotion signifies a life given, or devoted to God. He therefore is the devout [or godly] man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life, parts of piety [or godliness], by doing everything in the name of God, and under such rules as are conformable to his Glory.*³⁰

Now that we have discovered what “godliness” is, we can easily see what its counterpart, “ungodliness,” connotes. It is a lack of reverence for God that leads to a lack of devotion, as well as to unholy, sinful attitudes and behavior. God’s unmerited transforming grace moves us away from this to godliness!

The Renunciation Of Worldly Passions

In addition to renouncing ungodliness and living godly lives, God’s Spirit-applied, Christ-bought grace trains saints to renounce “worldly passions”. The term “worldly”³¹ means “of this present age,” in other words, “that which is at enmity with God or morally reprehensible”.³² Whatever is worldly is characterized by the world, an entire system or way of thinking and behaving which is not from God, is passing away, and the opposite of doing God’s will (1 John 2:15-17). These “passions” are desires arising from our flesh (1 John 2:16), things we see we want that are against the will of God (1 John 2:16). Such desires lead to sin (James 1:14-15). Living by worldly passions is characteristic of one who has given into worldliness. C. J. Mahaney explains what this is:

Worldliness, then, is a love for this fallen world. It is loving the values and pursuits of the world that stand opposed to God. More specifically, it is ‘to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God.’ It rejects God’s rule and replaces it with our own (like creating our own

*Bibles). It exalts our opinions above God's truth. It elevates our sinful desires for the things of this fallen world above God's commands and promises.*³³

It is interesting that Paul writes of not just rejecting sinful actions, but goes even deeper. The rejection of ungodliness goes beyond actions to the heart, but “worldly passions” go to that level with even greater emphasis. Paul is teaching that the transformation of God’s Spirit in Christ is not just about outward behavior, but such a person does not even want to desire or dwell on desires which are not pleasing to God (cf. Matthew 5:21-48).³⁴ This fits with what Paul writes about the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23. Paul teaches in that passage that what the Spirit produces in the saint is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Certainly the fruit involves actions, but they also go to the level of desires. Those in Christ are not just a new creation outwardly, but at the level of the heart (2 Cor. 5:17).³⁵

Self-Controlled Lives

Next Paul reveals that God’s grace works in us literally that “we might live soberly” (*sōphronōs*). The *sōphron-* word group is formed from *sōs*, “safe” or “sound,” and from *phren*, “the heart as the seat of the passions, the place where the activities of the soul are located.”³⁶ The adverb, “soberly” (*sōphronōs*) is used only here in the New Testament. Paul uses the *sōphron-* word group to mean either speaking or acting in a way that is within boundaries, thus to have one’s self under control, rather than merely living according to the moment, that is, without thought and without divinely-given control.³⁷ Such control is “restraint for the purpose of purity; restrain for the purpose of exalting God and not ourselves.”³⁸

As we have already seen from the parallel passage in Titus 3:5-6, that divinely-given control comes from the Holy Spirit being poured out on us richly in Jesus Christ. This also fits with what Paul writes elsewhere when he exhorts readers to operate in such a way they are empowered and directed by the Spirit so that they will not fulfill the desires of the sinful nature (Gal. 5:16), but instead they will carry out the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This is necessary since the one without the Spirit and dominated by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-7). It is important to see that “self-control” in the New Testament is control of self by the work of the Spirit, it does not connote controlling oneself by mere self effort or power.

Upright Lives

Next, Paul specifies the new life is not just one of restraint. It is also one of putting on the good, as is seen in the term “upright”. The word translated by the ESV as “upright”³⁹ is an adverb related to “righteous,” “righteousness,” and “justify”. The word is used to speak of how God operates in keeping with his own character (1 Peter 2:23) and so when applied to man means that one is thinking, relating, and behaving in a way that is in accord with who God is and his will. This is easy to see in 1 Corinthians 15:34 where it is found in the context of putting off sin and in 1 Thessalonians 2:10 where it is found in the context of holiness and blamelessness.

When Paul writes that we live “uprightly,” he means that we resemble God morally, which is the chief characteristic of the “new man”. Elsewhere the apostle writes: “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new

self, *created after the likeness of God* in true righteousness⁴⁰ and holiness.” (Eph. 4:22-24, emphasis added)

We Swim Against The Stream Of The Present Age

Paul makes it clear that we renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, we live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives not just in the age-to-come when sin will be removed.⁴¹ New life, shaped by heaven and eternity, marks the saint “in the present age” (v. 12). This current period in which we find ourselves is not just a time preceding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the New Heaven and New Earth, a time that marks the history of the present world (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; 1 Tim. 6:17). It also is a time, a world system, marked by: Falsehood and sin (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2), inferior wisdom which discounts God (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:18), the direction and spiritual blindness of the devil (2 Cor. 4:4), a realm out of which Jesus has delivered us by His death (Gal. 1:4), in other words, a direction which is antithetical to the ways and will of God (2 Tim. 4:10).

Christians, just like all people, find themselves in a place and time in which all is twisted by sin. Everything pulls in that direction. Even the creation itself has been subjected to futility because of sin (Rom. 8:20).

So, the apostle is making the point that in spite of all this, the salvation we have is so glorious that we are changed to swim against that stream. What is more, we learn that the reality we live in a fallen world, marked by sin, should be no excuse for sin. The reality that a Christian has impulses toward anger, materialism, selfishness, self-protecting falsehoods, extra-marital heterosexual desires, homosexual desires, or any other sin is not the end-of-the-story. We have been saved and transformed into a people who can say, “No,” to all that and “Yes” to God for his glory!

Christian, we should learn to celebrate this truth! In light of the reality we (and all creation) were twisted through sin (Genesis 3) should lead us to rejoice that God now leads us “in paths of righteousness for the sake of his name” (Psalm 23:3). O, what true and abundant life Jesus brought us (John 10:10)!

Summary Of The Gospel Impact Of 2:11-12

It was the 19th c. British Pastor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who once wrote:

*Truth is something like the cluster of the vine: if we would have wine from it, we must bruise it; we must press and squeeze it many times. The bruiser's feet must come down joyfully upon the bunches, or else the juice will not flow; and they must well tread the grapes, or else much of the precious liquid will be wasted. So we must, by meditation, tread the clusters of truth, if we would get the wine of consolation there from.*⁴²

Certainly, we have brought our feet down upon the grapes of Titus 2:11-12 again and again, treading the grapes thoroughly. Before we do the same with Titus 2:13-15, let's review the juice, the wine, the precious liquid that has flowed out of this vat.

Paul exhorts the young Titus to teach the church in Crete that which fits with the sound or right teaching Paul has handed down to him (2:1). This first means that Titus must call the saints to lifestyles which include older men and older women discipling younger men and women (2:2-6); being holy, namely sound in faith and love, steady, fearing God, telling the truth, practicing control of self in keeping with God's standards (2:2-7); exercising family life which is pleasing to God (2:5); and also glorifying God and showing forth the beauty of the gospel in one's behavior on the job (2:9-10). Additionally, Paul exhorts Timothy to be a sound example and to sound teaching as a Christian leader among the church (2:7-8). All these ethical teachings also comprise the standard for us today.

All of this vital practice within the Church is possible, even though we live in a world that swims upstream against the will of God, because God, in his sovereign grace, has forgiven and transformed those of us in Christ through his saving work, namely, pouring the sanctifying Spirit out upon us in Jesus Christ (2:11; 3:5-6). Specifically, the desires of the heart have been changed so that we no longer want merely to live for and unto our own sinful passions and the passions of the world, which include ignoring and rejecting God (2:12). Now, all believers reverence God and we are devoted to him (2:12) and desire to think, relate to others, and behave in ways that are within the bounds that please God, namely those ways in keeping with his own character (2:12).

Yet, Paul does not end here. He also goes on to write that the work of Jesus Christ in us forms us into a people who look forward to his appearing because he is the glorious and ultimate gift we receive in the gospel.

We turn our attention to that gift in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

GOSPEL-DIRECTED TRANSFORMATION, PART 2 (TITUS 2:13-15)

This past year my wife and I became grandparents for the first time, with the birth of our little precious Blaire Ellie. Since our daughter and son-in-law currently live in Guam, we do not get to see them often. About three months after Blaire was born Karen and I were blessed to visit them and to meet Blaire for the first time in person. Right away we were smitten with her! Because she captured our hearts, once we returned home, there was an ache to see her again. Skyping is good, but we want more! You might say that our love for her has produced an eager expectation of either her coming to see us or our going to see her.

In Titus 2:13, as Paul continues to describe the change that has taken place in those who have been regenerated and are in Jesus Christ, he describes a similar love-fueled expectation that the saint has for his Savior. Let's take a look at this.

Waiting For Our Blessed Hope

In addition to God's grace in Christ transforming believers into those who renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, as well as being devoted to God in this present age (Titus 2:11-12), another way in which the saint is transformed by the grace of God in Christ is that we are "waiting for our blessed hope".⁴³ When we look at Paul's teaching on hope in his epistles it becomes clear that here he is giving one more outcome of our salvation.

In the eyes of the apostle, hope is not a mere wish but a certain expectation (2 Cor. 10:15; Phil. 1:20; 1 Thes. 2:19) which is grounded in the promises of God who cannot lie

(Titus 1:2), it is first communicated in the gospel (Col. 1:5, 23), it arises within saints because of salvation (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:12; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 4:4)—namely because saints are united to Christ and he in the Christian brings hope (Col. 1:27; 2 Tim. 1:1), and it therefore, comes as a result of God’s grace working through his Spirit in the Christian (Rom. 15:13; 2 Thes. 2:16). The main focus of Paul’s certain expectation is future reward, more specifically ultimate salvation, i.e. resurrection and the glorification of the body in the future (Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6, 7, 20; Rom. 5:2; 8:23-24; 1 Cor. 9:10; 2 Cor. 3:12; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:5; 1 Thes. 4:13; 5:8; Titus 1:2; 3:7). This hope is grown by the Word of God (Rom. 15:4) and by suffering (Rom. 5:4-5). It also results in patience (Rom. 8:25; 1 Thes. 1:3).

Since the word “blessed” (*makarios*) is in the same case and number as “hope,” it describes something about “hope,” which is the direct object of “waiting for”.⁴⁴ This Christ-accomplished certain expectation of future resurrection and glorification is described as “blessed” in that it is the ultimate way in which God’s benefits are showered upon the saint. In other words, it speaks of being saved, glorified, and being with him for eternity. The word *makarios* not only denotes blessing from God, but also the happiness that comes from such blessing. It is no wonder that Paul says the saved person is eagerly waiting for this blessing and happiness-filled hope! We wait for the time when we are perfected like Christ (Rom. 8:29-30; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:20-21), fully rewarded with the riches of our inheritance from God (Eph. 1:18), not the least of which is our future spiritual and bodily perfection (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17), as well as the continual showering of God’s grace and kindness upon us throughout eternity (Eph. 2:7). Most of all, the blessed hope is the gain of being with Christ (John 14:3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21),

for he is the one who makes the riches of our inheritance so glorious. In his presence is “fullness of Joy” and “pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11)!

In a passage in which Paul is emphasizing transformational outcomes of the gospel, it should also be noted that the “blessed hope” of the saint has a transformational power (Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thes. 1:3; 1 John 3:2-3). Knowing that we have a certain reward and gain of being with Christ, as well as the fact that we will meet our holy Savior, encourages us to be steadfast and to be pure. So, “waiting for our blessed hope” is not merely tacked on to the rest of the changes of verses 11-12, it is a vital part of the change accomplished in us which itself brings more transformation!⁴⁵

Now that we know what Paul means by “blessed hope” and that it is so wrapped up in the union of Christ with his Church, along with his future coming, we also see that the rest of the verse modifies this “blessed hope”. As such, the word “and” is better translated as “even”. What we have then is that we eagerly wait for “the blessed hope, even the appearing....” Paul says we wait for the “appearing of the glory” because the term “appearing” is almost always used by Paul to speak of the future coming of Jesus Christ to bring judgment upon the wicked and to bring the reward of resurrection and glorification to his saints (2 Thes. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8). It is an appearing of “glory” since Jesus Christ will come in a glorious manner (1 Thes. 4:16), defeating his enemies in a glorious way (2 Thes. 4:8), and he will be glorified in his saints (2 Thes. 1:10) in that they will be transformed and all created beings will see who the saints really are and how magnificently Christ has saved and transformed them (1 John 3:2).

One other reason that this blessed hope, this appearing, is so glorious has to do with who will be appearing. Paul writes that the glory is “of our great God and Savior Jesus

Christ”. This phrase is powerful for several reasons. First, the way Paul words this, it is clear that Jesus Christ is God. In the Greek text “God,” “Savior,” and “Jesus Christ” all appear in the same case,⁴⁶ which means they collectively serve together to show whose glory will appear or we might say who is the source of the glory. Also, there is one article (when translated the Greek article is usually rendered “the”) that stands at the front of and governs this entire phrase with the result that Paul is focusing on only one being, not two. What the article shows us is that Paul is not saying that the glory comes from a great God and a great Savior who is Jesus Christ. It shows us that the glory is from “the great God who is also the Savior, that is, Jesus Christ”. We are eagerly awaiting the appearing of God, the second person of the Trinity, to bring his blessing and happiness upon us. We are anticipating the reward of the one who has always existed, by whom the entire visible and invisible world was created, for whom all things were created, by whom all things continue to exist, the King over all (Col. 1:15-17; 1 Tim. 1:17).

Christian, understand we wait for the coming of the God-man, the one who walked among us the first time to obey the Father and to die in our place that we might have salvation! We might think it is enough he would come once, but no! Paul tells us he is coming again. This time it will be to take us to himself that where he is there we may be also (John 14:3) in our resurrected body!

Imagine what it would be like if we knew our favorite president of the United States was coming to our house. Would there not be excitement? Would we not eagerly await and prepare for the day? We would anticipate talking to him, listening to him, being in his presence. Likewise, many of us have a Christian family member who has died, someone for whom our heart aches because we miss them. We sometimes entertain what

it will be like to see them again. We wait, we anticipate, we are filled with joy at the thought. We know what it is like to be away from home for a time and to have that joy of being reunited with parents, spouse, siblings, or grandparents. But, how much more than all these situations rolled into one ought we to be filled with joy and longing for the God of gods, the King of kings, the one who has created all and is the source of all that is good and holy. Someday we will see our God (Mt. 5:8)!

Next, this phrase is powerful because Paul reminds us we wait not just for God, but “our God”. Part of God’s covenant promises and faithfulness through history has been that he will be God to his people and they will be his people, they will belong to him (Ex. 19:5-6; Dt. 7:23; 9:3; 1 Chr. 17:24). This connotes that he will be in special relationship to those who trust in and know him to watch over and to bless them. He has engraved his people on the palms of his hands (Is. 49:16). This promise to be a God to his people and for them to belong to him is one he has also fulfilled in the New Testament Church (1 Peter 2:9-10) and a reality that will be part of the glory of the New Heaven and New Earth—“The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Rev. 21:7). From before the foundation of the earth God has chosen us to be his (Eph. 1:4). We belong to him and he is our God! We wait for the certain, blessing-filled, happy appearing of the God who is our God, the one to whom we belong!

Notice also there is power in this phrase because Paul says he is our “great God”. The word “great” in this context refers to one “of rank...eminent for ability, virtue, authority, power.”⁴⁷ In this only place where Paul uses this term in relation to God he is highlighting the fact that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is above all gods and others in power, authority, and holiness. It is one more way of highlighting the glory and

magnificence of the Lord. He is supreme, above all things and people! Nothing or no one should excite us and draw out our allegiance and passion like Jesus Christ!

Finally, this phrase is full of power in that Jesus Christ, who is God, yes our God, and a great God is also our “Savior”! It is the fact that he is Savior that shows his supremacy more than anything else. What is more, it is his work as Savior, as we have seen in this text, which leads to our transformation and undergirds the hope we have. This is why Paul writes elsewhere, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 6:14) In other words, he will not trust and exult ultimately in anything else for salvation and a transformed God-pleasing life other than the saving death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because “the entire world system, in all its [supposed] glory, but in opposition to God, is dead or destroyed in its power to attract [a true follower of Jesus Christ who understands his work]; it has no influence or power over [such a Christian], no [real and ultimate] appeal to him.”⁴⁸

This passage ends with Paul referring to “Jesus Christ” in 2:13. Then, in 2:14 he begins with the relative pronoun, “who,” which refers back to Jesus Christ. Verse 14, then has a very tight relationship to what precedes it.⁴⁹

So, we can now say that what we have in Titus 2:14 is a very focused statement upon how the gospel of Jesus Christ (his saving work) brings about change, a transformation which is outlined in the behaviors and actions of 2:1-10 and then in the more foundational heart and life changes in 2:11-13 standing behind those behaviors and actions. We now turn our attention to the meaning of Titus 2:14.

The Gospel Transformation Of Titus 2:14

Can you imagine a neighbor planting flowers every year only to cut them off with the lawnmower once they poke through the soil? Can you imagine that same neighbor answering when you inquire about this odd practice, “Oh, the flowers themselves are not important. What I think is really important is the root”? You might start keeping your distance, thinking him just a little odd to say the least!

This fictitious habit would be no different than how much of the Church functions. Many saints who value the gospel and its centrality say, in essence, “The flower is not important, we are about the root. We water the root, take care of it, but it is not important whether or not it ever comes through the ground and yields its beautiful product.” Some of these believers even think that allowing the flower to emerge is suspect. “It’s those liberal Christians, you know, the ones who don’t care about the root, who have flowers all over the place. We don’t want to be like them!”

Speaking of liberals, we are reminded that there are those who profess the name of Christ who think flowers are crucial. They have looked around at a world full of weeds and bare earth and concluded, “We’ve got to get some flowers out!” So, they go around sticking flowers in the ground without root and, of course, there is nothing to sustain them. And, since they are the ones putting the flowers out, they get the glory, not God.

Finally, there is another class of those who profess the name of Christ who are very sound in some ways and who, like the liberal gardeners, go around sticking flowers in the ground since they believe doing this puts them in good stead with the chief gardener. It is not that some of them don’t have concern for the world, but a primary concern is earning the favor of the chief gardener.

A common problem in each of these scenarios is that the flower and the root are severed. The root represents the gospel, that is, the God-glorifying, Christ-bought, Spirit-applied work of salvation that brings blessed hope along with transformation. The root brings divine life and resources into the soil of our being. Because of this, it produces flowers. The flowers represent the outcome of the gospel in believers, things found in Titus 2:1-13 such as godliness, Spirit-empowered control of self, rejecting worldly desires, loving others, relating to our spouses and family in God-glorifying ways, doing our work and ministry to the glory of God, submitting to authorities over us, and helping those in need.

When people try to help the world and/or earn the favor of God by producing their own flowers, we are fighting a losing battle from the beginning. At the same time, when those who understand that they are saved by grace through faith and not works (Eph. 2:8-9) ignore the importance of the outgrowth of the gospel, the transformed way they are to think, behave, and relate to others for God's glory and their benefit, they are not only ignoring one of the purposes of the cross, they are also diluting the degree to which created beings (men and angels) see the glory of God's grace on display.

The inescapable logic of Titus 2:14 is that the life-giving root of the glorious gospel produces the God-glorifying, people-benefiting flower of a transformed life. In other words, those who have been changed through and through by the redemption of Christ, accomplished for and applied to them, should be the most eager and excited about good works! As the doctrinally-sound, healthy Church has always affirmed, "We are saved through faith alone, but it is not a faith that remains alone."

Where It Begins: The Cross

The text of Titus 2:14 reads: “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

There is no lack of clarity on the part of Paul. Nor is there any sense that the people-benefiting, God-glorifying ways found in the context are produced in people by their own power or by divine distribution to all people naturally. No! Transformation begins at the cross!

First, we learn that it is said of Jesus Christ (cf. Titus 2:13) “who gave himself in behalf of us”. There was no reluctance here. Jesus Christ gave himself in behalf of those who are a people for his own possession. This giving here in Titus 2:14, is said “to redeem” which shows that it refers to the death of Jesus Christ. So, we are at the heart of the gospel. The Bible is clear that Christ’s death pays the penalty for the sins of God’s people which removes the enmity between them and God, reconciles them to God, and as we saw above, secures the pouring out upon them of the transforming Spirit. Paul is telling Titus, in essence: “Teach the Church in Crete that the cross, the root, produces amazing change, the flower. This is why the commands of 2:1-10 and 3:1-2 can be done.”

There is no other verse in the Bible that shows with greater clarity the centrality of the gospel to Christian living and transformation.

The Purposes For The Cross

There are many purposes stated in the Bible for the cross of which two are found here in Titus 2:14.

(1) To Redeem Us From All Lawlessness

This aim not only states the negative (what people are saved from), but seems to lay the foundation for why the second purpose can take place. Let's examine this foundation more closely.

“Lawlessness” elsewhere in Paul is parallel to sins from which those who have faith in Jesus Christ as Savior are forgiven (Romans 4:7)⁵⁰ and is opposite of holiness (Rom. 6:19) and righteousness (2 Cor. 6:14). It emphasizes acts and thoughts that go against the revealed will of God and do not conform to the character of God. If someone said, “The legislature removed the lottery from the entire state,” the last phrase is using “entire state” in the same manner Paul is using “all lawlessness” here.⁵¹ In fact, the word “lawlessness” is in a form that communicates separation, in other words, the redeemed are removed from the state or realm of lawlessness. Finally, that it is in the singular reinforces what we are saying, for it means Paul is arguing that Jesus Christ redeemed a certain class of people from the realm of lawlessness which not only means they are forgiven of individual lawless deeds, but have been freed from the dominion of lawlessness, similar to what we see him saying in Romans 6 regarding sin (esp. 6:18).

What the apostle establishes here, then, is that Jesus did not give himself on the cross only for the purpose of forgiving sins and giving eternal life, he also gave himself so that the saved person can live in a way that is no longer dominated by sin.

The infinitive “to redeem,”⁵² expresses purpose and denotes “buy back” or “free by paying a ransom”. In 1 Peter 1:18 Peter speaks of believers being redeemed from futile ways inherited from forefathers and this is, as we see in 1:19, “with the precious blood of Christ”. The sense of freeing or redeeming supports the understanding that Paul is

teaching we are redeemed or freed from the realm of lawlessness by means of the death of Jesus Christ.

What we have, then, in the first two clauses of this verse is a statement of Penal Substitutionary Atonement by which Jesus Christ has freed a particular people from the realm of lawlessness whereby they are not only no longer under its curse, but also are freed from its dominion. By Penal Substitutionary Atonement I mean that Jesus Christ is a sacrifice to forgive the sin of the sinner and to remove God's wrath from him, resulting in reconciliation to God (atonement). This has been accomplished by Jesus paying sin's penalty (penal) in the place of the sinner (substitutionary).

Have you repented of your sin, received, and rested upon Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Have you seen evidence of the transforming work of the Spirit in you, which is an indication that Jesus Christ has saved you and will finish his work in you (Ephesians 1:13-14; Phil. 1:6)? If you can answer, "Yes," to these questions, you have the assurance that in eternity-past the Father gave you to the Son for the Son to save (John 6:37, 39:10:29) and therefore you are one of the sheep for whom Jesus laid down his life (John 10:15) so you would be forgiven and would follow him (John 10:16, 27).

To put it another way, in eternity-past the Father chose you to save (Eph. 1:4), he determined to give the Son as a sacrifice for your sin (2 Cor. 5:21). As a result, we learn in Romans 6 you died with Christ on the cross, you were buried with Christ in the grave, and you were raised with Christ from the realm of death! Therefore, you are a new person. You are saved! The blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses you from your sin (1 John 1:7)! You are reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:18)! No one can snatch you out of the hand of the Son or the Father (John 10:27-30)!

Oh, Christian, understand what a great salvation you have (Heb. 2:3)! Understand what a great love the Father and Son have for you (Rom. 8:31-39; Eph. 3:14-19; 1 John 3:16)! Understand the perfect and complete resources you now have in Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4)! In this statement by Paul, “he gave himself for us to redeem us,” there is a lifetime of theology, there are enough lessons and motivation for worship to occupy us for eternity! Both the Father and Son have willingly, with pleasure (cf. Isaiah 53:10; Heb. 12:2), given the Son and their full resources for you. If this is true, then they will not keep back any lesser gifts you need (Rom. 8:31-32), including the empowering, fruit-bearing, life-transforming presence of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11; Lk. 11:13).

Before you read on, pause and give thanks and praise to God for what he has done for you. Ask him to increase your faith and delight in his glorious and ongoing work in you, that you would never take it for granted, that you would never pass over it lightly, that you would see it is no longer the old you who lives, but Christ who lives in you (Gal. 2:20). Now there is a new you with a new life to live with the certainty of eternal reward—all because Christ loved you and gave himself for you!

(2) To Purify For Himself A People

In the remainder of the verse we learn of the second stated purpose for which Christ gave himself on the cross. We must keep in mind that, in accordance with Pauline thought elsewhere, this second purpose is accomplished through redemption.

The only other two times Paul uses the verb translated “to purify” it is parallel to “holiness” (2 Cor. 7:1) and “sanctify” (Eph. 5:26). It clearly connotes forgiveness of sin elsewhere (1 John 1:7). Paul is teaching that through Christ-accomplished forgiveness of sin, the unclean enemy standing of the sinner (Ps. 5:4; Is. 59:2; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 3:9-20,

23; 5:10; Heb. 9:7) is removed with the result they are set apart unto Jesus Christ for his service. The language rests upon the Old Testament whereby God set apart a people for himself to serve him (Ex. 19:5-6), which included a priesthood that had to be purified to serve him and the other people (Lev. 8:1-36).

The language of purifying “a people” is definite.⁵³ Jesus Christ did not die to make all people redeemable or to make it possible that all people might be purified, if they would add their faith to the equation. Instead, he died to redeem fully and to purify completely a particular people. The difference is important. What Paul is saying is from beginning to end Jesus Christ has accomplished without question all that this “people” need “for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). In other words, he is not saying a people are redeemed and purified, if they do everything just right. No! The Church has been purchased and given all they need in Christ to carry out God’s ethical demands upon them (the specifics found in Titus 2:1-13).

Next, we discover there is an outward focus in this second purpose. The word translated “for his own possession” is a term used only here in the New Testament. However, it is used several times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to speak of God’s people who were his own or his treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Its use in the Old Testament speaks of God’s sovereign, gracious choice of his people, his special covenant with them, and also their resultant call to be his billboards to the rest of the world.⁵⁴ This is seen with particular force in Exodus 19:6. After God told Israel they would be his treasured possession among all peoples (19:5), the text says: “and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” On this verse Kenneth Laing Harris helpfully explains:

*When the Lord calls Israel ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,’ he is not referring exclusively to the role that Aaron and his sons will fill as priests (28:1) but also to what Israel’s life as a whole is to represent among the nations. By keeping the covenant (19:5), the people of Israel would continue both to set themselves apart from, and also mediate the presence and blessing of the Lord to, the nations around them (see Gen. 12:3; Deut. 4:6...).*⁵⁵

The language used in reference to the entire nation of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 also emphasizes that they were to be a treasured possession belonging to God (“my treasured possession”) and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation “to me”. In other words, in the same way God had set aside priests within the nation unto himself (unto his service [Exodus 28:1; Lev. 8:1-35]), so he was setting aside or consecrating the entire nation to serve him. This is also the significance of the words “for himself” in Titus 2:14. The Lord Jesus Christ has purified “for himself” a people for his own possession. We should not only see this as one more indication of the deity of Jesus Christ (he is doing that which in the Old Testament only God did), we should also understand that the New Testament Church is saved, set apart, purified, and consecrated to serve him, to represent him to the rest of the world.⁵⁶

Though the word translated “for his own possession” is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, the same concept is found in 1 Peter 2:9-10 where Peter writes: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people *for his own possession* (different term), that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (emphasis added) Peter, in quoting Exodus 19:5 and alluding to texts in Hosea, shows that the New Testament Church now fulfills the role Israel at one time had. We are redeemed and purified to

proclaim the great saving acts and grace of God that the nations may come to glorify God (1 Peter 2:12).

Paul is very clear in Titus 2:14 that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for a people that we might be transformed into those who glorify him! Once again, this necessitates that the applied saving work of Christ radically changes us.

There is one more description of the saved people of God in this verse that highlights our God-honoring transformation. We are able to glorify God as the redeemed special possession of God because the Spirit of Christ poured out on us in Jesus Christ makes us “zealous for good works”. Let’s look more closely at this important phrase.

The word for “zealous” denotes being eager and committed to do something because it is very important. Paul uses it in Galatians 1:14 to speak of his former zeal for the legal traditions as a Pharisee. In Acts 20:21 it refers to thinking the law of God is important. That Jesus Christ has redeemed us so that we would end up being zealous for good works is one more indication that he changes our heart so that we desire him and those things which are pleasing to God (cf. Titus 2:11-13). Granted, these desires can either be fed that they grow (Heb. 5:14) or they can be ignored with the result they wane (2 Peter 2:14). Yet, Paul is clear that zeal for good works is a certain outgrowth of the work of Christ in us.⁵⁷

Good works for Paul are the outcome of our new life in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:10). They are the very kinds of actions Paul delineates in Titus 2-3:

- The opposite of “all lawlessness”. Good works, then, in context, are carrying out the will of God, as revealed in His Word.⁵⁸ (2:14)

- Sanctification, that is, being remade after the image of God and enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness:
 - Renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions (2:12).
 - Living of self-controlled, upright, and godly lives (2:2, 5, 6, 12).
 - Purifying anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ (2:13).
 - Clear thinking and focus on the things of God, including reverence in behavior (2:2, 3).
 - Speaking evil of no one (3:2).
 - Avoiding quarreling (3:2).
 - Being gentle and showing courtesy (3:2).
- Readiness for every good work (willingness and ability [a total renewal—3:5]), even a devotion to good works (3:1, 8).
- Godly love for family (2:4).
 - Acceptance and practice of roles in marriage (2:5).
 - Ability to carry out our domestic responsibilities (2:5).
- The ability and willingness to disciple fruitfully (2:4-5).
- The ability for a gospel minister to be a model of good works, as well as integrity, dignity, and sound speech in his teaching (2:8).
- Living out godliness on the job (2:10).
- The willingness and ability to submit to civil government (3:1).
- Meeting urgent physical needs of others (3:14).⁵⁹
- Living for the glory of God and His Word (2:5, 8, 10).

According to the structure of the letter, Paul means to explain how these good works are to come about, namely as an outcome of the grace of God in the believer. This fits with what he writes elsewhere: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). More specifically in Titus 2 Paul teaches all these good works flow out of the cross of Jesus Christ. It is safe to say that all we are, all we have, all we ever will be, all we ever will have, flow out of the saving work of our Lord for us and in us!

What Paul teaches here in Titus about good works is in line with what he teaches throughout his other letters, as we find out in Appendix Two.

Summary Of Titus 2:13-15

Part of the change that takes place in us because of the gospel is we come to understand the ultimate treasure and reward of the good news is Jesus Christ himself (2:13). This last reality is why those of us who have truly been transformed by the grace of God eagerly anticipate the glorious coming of Jesus Christ at which time he will bring judgment upon the enemies of God and will resurrect and glorify all of us who have been redeemed by him. It is in this future certainty wherein we find ultimate happiness and the saving benefits of God. As such, all true Christians are transformed even further by the reality we will someday see and be with God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who is our God and has made us his people, and who has saved us!

How was our future blessed hope purchased for us and how do we know it is a certainty? The answer to both is that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a substitute for the Church to pay the penalty for our sins. The stated purpose of his saving death is that he might free us from judgment and the dominion of sin, and to set us apart as a purified,

changed people (Titus 3:5-6) who are both his special treasure (his billboard) and who are eager to perform and think it very important to carry out good works (the outcomes of the gospel).

This transformation takes place since Jesus Christ has removed the enmity between us and God (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:16) and thereby won for us the pouring out of the sanctifying Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-6). These outcomes not only include family responsibilities, holiness, going about our occupations in God-honoring ways, living to bring others to Christ, but they also include devoting ourselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need—helping those who lack the necessities of life.

Without a doubt, there is a direct line from Calvary to the calling of God upon us, from the hill of Christ's death to our holiness, from the mangled body of Christ upon the tree to our mission. The Christian is empowered, shaped, strengthened, yes directed in all he does, by the gospel!

After stomping on the grapes of Titus 2:11-14, we have not only tasted of its sweet juice, we also have begun to discover the gospel should direct, shape, and inform the entire life and ministry of the Church. We have seen that it is right for it to “stain” our every word and deed, for its “smoke” to cling to us as smoke does to a returning fireman. In fact, in Titus 2:15 Paul tells Titus, “Declare these things.” In other words, teach the Church these truths; apply them, show how they impact the saints. Even more, in Titus 3:8 Paul writes, “I want you to insist on these things.”

Following Paul's exhortation, we can see it will be helpful for us to consider in Part 2 the details of just how the gospel should color all we are and all we do. There we will apply what we have learned to topics such as evangelism, making disciples, growth in the

Christian life, the ministries of the Word, how congregational life is structured, and ministry to the physical needs of people—all to see how the gospel empowers and shapes these areas.

Before we go there, however, we must see that what we have learned about the gospel in Titus 2:11-15 is not an isolated teaching, but agrees with what the rest of the Bible teaches. We turn to that subject in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

You've just discovered a member of the youth ministry in your congregation has been sexually active with his girlfriend. You are surprised because he made a profession of faith as a young child and has been living as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ up until recently. How will you seek to help him?⁶⁰ Certainly, the way in which we answer that question and act will, in large part, depend upon our view of the Bible. One approach would be to pull out commands and principles to share. Certainly, this should be part of a good approach since all Scripture "is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). God will use such corrective divine wisdom to bring light and peace to times of darkness and chaos. Yet, if not careful, we can either leave such a person discouraged because they are trying to live out God's commands on their own, or we can form them into a type of the Pharisees, who were deceived into a confidence that in their own abilities they could please and honor God.⁶¹

What is needed in such a situation and in our own interaction with Scripture, as we seek to be grown by God's truth, is to apply God's Word in light of the overarching Christ-centered, gospel-driven storyline of the Bible. Mike Emlet explains:

If we don't ultimately view the Bible as an unfolding, cohesive story of God's redemption that comes to completion in Jesus Christ, our use of Scripture in ministry situations has the potential to miss him—and so will our hearers. Those we minister to need more than commands, principles, examples, and systematic theological categories per se. Rather, they need to be connected in vital relationship with a Redeemer. Because the Bible tells the story of God's rescue mission that centers on the Redeemer Jesus Christ, wherever we are in Scripture we want to ask the questions, "How does this passage fit into the broader story of redemption?" "What difference does the death and resurrection of Jesus make for the way I would understand and apply this passage to my brother or sister?"

*Approaching the Bible in this Christ-centered way in no way minimizes the importance of commands, principles, characters, and doctrine in Scripture. Rather, it puts all of them in a gospel-centered relational framework that avoids dispensing superficial “Bible-band-aids.”*⁶²

Such an approach is not forcing a theological system upon the Bible. Rather, it is merely reading the Bible in the way it interprets itself. In Matthew 2:13 the Gospel writer applies Hosea 11:1 (“Out of Egypt I called my son.”) to the infant Jesus and his parents who fled to Egypt from Herod, thus implying that the Israel-God bond during that period of history prefigured the coming of the second person of the Trinity, the one who is the “only begotten Son from the Father”.⁶³ Three chapters later Jesus himself reveals he came to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures (Mt. 5:17) and then clarifies that this fulfillment applies even to the most detailed aspects of the Law (Mt. 5:18), thus leaving his hearers and the subsequent readers of Matthew to understand that all of the Old Testament in some way or another prepared the world for his coming by teaching truths which would help people understand who Jesus Christ is and what he came to accomplish. The apostle Paul took up this same position when he wrote that the dietary laws, festivals, and Sabbath laws of the Old Testament “are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

What is strongly “whispered” in these passages just cited is “shouted through a bullhorn” elsewhere. Toward the end of his Gospel Luke records this about the risen Jesus’ words to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27): “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” The Lord was able to go throughout all the Old Testament and show how it pointed to him. Peter, as recorded by Luke in Acts 10:43, makes the same point about the Old Testament prophets: “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone

who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” This affirmation preached by Peter takes us further than any of the previous texts since it shows that the Old Testament was not only Christ-focused, it also alludes to the gospel, the very point made by Paul in Romans 1:1-2: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” This is why these well-worn words about the relationship of the Old to the New Testament are applicable to the gospel: “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed.”⁶⁴

When we grasp that at the core of the New Testament it reveals, explains, and flows out of the gospel of Jesus Christ,⁶⁵ we are left with the inescapable conclusion that the entire Bible either looks forward to, prepares for, reveals, explains, or flows out of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is in seed form in the Old Testament and blossoms forth in the New with all its glorious color. In no way, then, are the findings of Chapters 1-2 confined to one text!

This pattern of the good news we see throughout all of Scripture includes this line of truth: God brought into existence all creation to glorify him, a purpose from which mankind fell because of sin and yet God has provided salvation through his unmerited favor resulting in Spirit-empowered, Christ-focused, faith-fueled obedience (an obedience man is unable to carry out on his own power) that honors God.

We start in our Old Testament discussion by demonstrating the ultimate purpose for which God does all things. This sets the tone for our discussion.

God Does All For His Glory

One place this is stated with clarity is Psalm 77:13-14. In this psalm there is great lamentation for an unspecified difficult situation the people of God face in which it feels like God has turned his face away from them (1-9). What brings hope is a remembrance of the glorious ways God has worked in the past among his people (10-20). Though it is never explicitly stated, it appears that this remembrance leads to a renewed faith.

After the psalmist says he will remember the deeds of the LORD, his wonders of old, he will ponder all God's works and meditate on his mighty deeds, we find the two verses under consideration. They read: "Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? ¹⁴You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples."

God's "way" is his manner of doing things, especially as related to saving his people and working in and among them through all the years (11-12, 15-20). Since this way is remembered to find help and comfort for the present calamities, the affirmation about God's way also refers to his manner of doing things at all times (his works of providence).⁶⁶ Asaph affirms that God's way is "holy" (lit. "in holiness"). Jonathan Leeman helpfully explains about God's holiness: "People often define *holiness* as the fact that God is 'set apart.' But the fact that he is 'set apart' doesn't tell us what he is set apart *to*. If God hates sin, it's because sin opposes something that God loves, and what does God most love? He most loves his glory...."⁶⁷ God loves and does all ultimately for this end.⁶⁸ Since God accomplishes all he sets out to do (Is. 46:9-10), this means he always accomplishes this purpose to which he has set himself apart. As Psalm 77:13 affirms, he is always and ever characterized by this trait, thus, he is always and ever holy (Is. 6:3).

As such, we should rightly conclude: “God’s holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.”⁶⁹

Having this understanding of God’s holiness, we can now see that “the holiness of God does not separate his presence out from the earth, but just the opposite; it fills the earth with his presence so that he might display his unique and exclusive glory.”⁷⁰ This is why God’s ultimate goal toward which he is taking the world is that all “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). As we see here in Psalm 77:13, this is the end toward which all God’s ways of working are pointed.

This characteristic way of working by God gives comfort to Asaph and also the impetus to trust in him for present help. After all, since he is the God who works miraculous saving wonders in behalf of his people and has displayed his might among the nations (14), then this implies God always works in this way. Part of the very nature of God is that he puts himself on display, he glorifies himself, and as a result his people benefit.

This sets the framework in which we must understand all of history and the biblical revelation that sheds light upon all God’s works of providence. This puts in perspective man’s ultimate purpose (to glorify God through faith-fueled obedience), man’s plight (he has sinned, that is, fallen short of glorifying God), man’s remedy (God saves in such a way as to put on display his might, not man’s), and the outcome of man’s salvation (he is to live in a manner that displays God’s power in him).

Faith-Fueled Obedience: God’s Original Purpose For Man

When God created man he “crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5), which means God created man in his image, to display his glory as his vice-regents (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps.

8:6). We learn from later statements God will make a new covenant with his people for the glory of his name by putting his Spirit in his people to such a full extent he will cause them to walk in his ways and obey his laws so that man glorifies God by faith-fueled obedience (Ezek. 36:22-38).⁷¹

This God-glorifying, faith-fueled obedience was part of God’s original design for man. After God created Adam, he placed him in the garden of Eden “to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15) and then commanded the man: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). The text is very emphatic as it records God’s admonition to eat in verse 16. God wanted man to eat to his full and to enjoy completely the creation God had given to him. Yet, there was only one exception, only one tree from which man was not to eat. In the day he did this, he would definitely die. When we consider that Satan attacked Adam and Eve at the very place of faith in God by causing them to doubt (Gen. 3:1-5) and when we consider that what led them to eat of the forbidden fruit was the delight and pleasure it promised (Gen. 3:6), we see that God gave to man the command to eat and the command not to eat of one tree as a test to see if man would trust in him—that God knows best—and, as a result, obey him. So, even prior to the fall of man, God’s design was for man to glorify him by showing forth God’s great worth, namely, he is worthy to be trusted and followed.

John Piper helpfully explains this state in which man was created in this way:

When God had created man, he made a covenant with him that he should live and enjoy all the benefits of the creation, but that he would die if he forsook the obedience that comes from faith. God commanded him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus forsake his childlike dependence upon God for all things.⁷²

This not only pinpoints man’s original purpose, it also helps us understand what sin is.

Man's Sin

Adam and Eve did not continue in the condition in which they were created, but doubted God's Word, his goodness, and they turned to themselves and to the forbidden tree as other gods (thus showing that idolatry is at the heart of all sin, as we also see in Ex. 20:3-6; 2 Ki. 17:7; Isaiah 45-46). More specifically, we can say, "Desiring to be like God, our first parents forsook the obedience of faith, ate of the forbidden tree, sinned against God, and fell from the innocence in which they were created."⁷³ Consider the evidence from Genesis 3:1-10:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

That they fell from the innocence in which they were created is important, for it introduces the reality that since Adam and Eve transgressed God's law that taught them to "act in perfect holiness from a heart of faith to the glory of God,"⁷⁴ they have become bound to the realm of sin and death (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:19b), which has left them alienated from God (Gen. 3:8), from each other (Gen. 3:12, 16b), from creation (Gen. 3:16a, 17-19a), and in a miserable state whereby they are not only under God's wrathful judgment

(Dt. 32:22-35; Pss. 1:4-6; 34:21; 91:8), but they also are incapable of pleasing God (Gen. 6:9; Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 13:23; 17:9).

What this means is that before God shows his mercy to man, he must show man his sinfulness and inability (Lev. 26:40-42; Dt. 8:2-3, 15-17; Hosea 5:14-15). Jonathan Edwards explains:

It is God's manner to make men sensible of their misery and unworthiness before he appears in his mercy and love to save them.... He very commonly so orders it in his providence and so influences men by his Spirit that they are brought to see their miserable condition as they are in themselves, and to despair of help from themselves, or from an arm of flesh before he appears for them, and also makes them sensible of their sin and their unworthiness of God's help. This appears from the accounts which the Scriptures give us of God's dealings with his people.⁷⁵

According to Old Testament revelation, not only does this leave man in need of God's unmerited provision to love, trust, and obey God, it leaves him in need of God's reaching out to him in his sinful plight to bring him to faith, repentance, love of God, and the ability to please God. Contrary to what many believe about the Old Testament, God did not command man to obey the law in his own power and expect him to do the same. Even under the old covenant, man was helpless to do God's will in his own power.

Man's Helplessness

In Psalm 86:1 we discover from the pen of David that one of the marks of the godly one who trusts in God (Ps. 86:2) is that he recognizes he is "poor and needy". He is crying out for help in the face of opposition from men who have risen up against him (86:14) and knows that he needs help through God's grace so he can be glad (86:4), can have the strength to go on (86:16a) and so he can be delivered (86:16b). Though we will argue below that the sense of man's helplessness apart from God is even clearer in the New Testament, nevertheless it is present in the Old as well.

This same theme is also found in Psalm 127 where Solomon celebrates the blessing that children are to their parents (vv. 3-5). Yet, if the family is to be a home that honors the LORD, he must ultimately be the one who builds it (v. 1a): “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” The clause “in vain they labor” connotes hard work that does not bring about the good, God-honoring, covenant-consistent, people-benefiting results that God’s people desire. Conversely, for the LORD to build the house means he blesses in and through efforts in such a way that the home has God-honoring, covenant-consistent, people-benefiting outcomes.

Though the main focus in this psalm is on the home, the two examples that follow in verses 1b-2 are included to show how extensive the need for God’s grace should be applied—namely in all areas of life: “Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.”⁷⁶

The Necessity Of Man’s Dependence Upon God

Man’s needed dependence upon God not only follows from the fact that God governs the affairs of men (Ps. 103:19; Prov. 16:1, 9; 19:21; Dan. 4:35), but especially from the presence of sin. A fallen world, full of sinful men, leads to inability to trust in, love, and serve God, as well as great conflict against creation and other men.

In a psalm we just briefly introduced (Psalm 86), David calls upon God for help against opposition (1-4, 14), help to walk in God’s way when it is hard (11), strength and deliverance (16-17), all based upon who God is and his past grace shown to David. Since God is good (5), forgiving (5), abounding in steadfast love (5), has already saved David (13), is one who faithfully hears the prayers of his people (6-7), and is the only true great

God who will ultimately bring all peoples to worship and glorify him (8-10), David knows he can call upon God and trust him for present and future help. This is the pattern of the gospel in seed form that sprouts forth and blossoms fully in the New Testament.

That man must trust fully in God comes through not only in specific passages of the Old Testament, but also in its larger metanarrative.⁷⁷ There are various doors in the Bible we could open up, walk through, and through which we may glimpse this overarching account of what God is doing in history, but one of the best is Jeremiah 31:31-34, a text which paints a very helpful picture of God's work from beginning to end. It reads:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jeremiah, at this point in his book that was written for Judah in exile, is drawing their attention forward to the future and the glorious way that God will work to restore his people. What the Savior shall do exceeds what he has done in the past or what he is doing in the present. In the process of giving this prophesy of hope, a promise of a new covenant is given, a new covenant that came through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:25) and was fulfilled in the "Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31) that is the New Testament Church (Heb. 8:8-12).

This prophecy reveals first of all why a new covenant is needed. In Jeremiah 31:32 we read that the new covenant will not be "like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my

covenant that they broke, though I was their husband....” Here we are taken back to Genesis and Exodus where we learn that God created the world and mankind all good and without sin (Gen. 1-2), yet man sinned (Gen. 3:1-7) and, as a result, Adam plunged himself, his descendants, and all creation into a fallen state whereby all is twisted and permeated by sin and death (Gen. 2:15; 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 8:20). This horrid condition stems from man’s separation from God (Gen. 3:8; Is. 59:2; Hab. 1:13) and the reality that God’s wrath rests upon the sons and daughters of Adam (e.g. Gen. 6:5-7; 18:1-19:29; Ex. 20:22-23:33). So, in summary, standing behind this text is creation and the fall.

In these words of Jeremiah 31:32 we also are reminded that God is a merciful God who saves. That God made covenant with the forefathers of Judah and became like a husband to them reminds us that God did not leave all mankind in the state of sin and misery resulting from sin. In fact, even in the midst of pronouncing to Adam and Eve his judgment for sin, he gives his first promise of good news, that he will accomplish redemption through a descendant of Eve and will defeat the one who introduced sin into the world, Satan: “The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; *he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*” (Gen. 3:15, emphasis added)

The manner in which God went about this salvation was to set apart for himself a people who would love, trust in, and follow him (Gen. 6:8-9:17), eventually a people who comprised one nation as descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), a nation among whom God could work to give privileges such that they experienced his rest and peace (Deut.

12:8-14), his presence and how he must be approached through forgiveness-bringing, wrath-removing sacrifice—prefigured in the sacrifices of the Old Testament (Ex. 25:8; Lev. 16:1-34; 17:11; Col. 2:16-17), and a nation out of whom the redeemer could come (Gen. 22:18; Is. 52:13-53:12). By the covenants God made with Abraham and his descendants (Israel), including the body of laws he gave them to live by because he had saved them from bondage (Ex. 20:2), God taught the world that he would not overlook sin, but would save in such a way that his mercy triumphs and sin is justly atoned (Ex. 34:6-7; Rom. 3:26); what is required of the person who would experience his salvation and live in his presence within intimate relationship (Pss. 15:1-5; 91:14-16); and specifically how such a person would live in solemn agreement with him to his glory (Ex. 20:2-17). Simply-put, Israel was to be a “light for the nations” (Is. 42:6; 49:6)—showing through their great privileges (Pss. 33:12; 103:7; 147:19-20; Rom. 3:2) what it looks like to know and live for the true God and to do it in such a way as to draw others to him.

So, in addition to reminding us of creation and fall, Jeremiah 31 reminds us that God has not left all mankind to perish, but has accomplished redemption. Yet, in the way that Jeremiah words this prophecy he also reminds us that Israel never fully kept the covenant of God (v. 32), which is why God would make a new covenant whereby he would write his law upon the hearts of his people, change them from the inside out, and enable them to walk in his ways, to his glory—which has always been the intent of God for mankind (Jer. 31:33; cf. Gen. 2:16-17; Dt. 10:12-13). Implied in these words of Jer. 31:32-33 is the hard reality that regardless of what advantages God gave to Israel, they would never follow him in a manner that pleased him. What was needed was for the Son of God to become man, to die in the place of God’s people, to be raised from the dead to defeat sin

and death, and in union with the people of God, to bring to God's people the gift of God's righteousness by which they could be reconciled to God and could have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit by whom God's people could walk in the ways of God (Ez. 36:26-27; John 16:7-11; Rom. 6:1-19; 8:1-17; Gal. 5:1-26; Eph. 4:7-12; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; 1 Pt. 3:18; 2 Pt. 1:3-4). Little else in Scripture, then, highlights man's helplessness apart from God and the need for dependence upon his Savior as does Jer. 31:31-34.

Finally, we see that Jeremiah looks forward in this text to the dawning, as well as the full completion, of God's kingdom through Jesus Christ when he writes: "And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34**And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:33-34) There is coming a time when God will teach his people more directly resulting in true knowledge of him, a reality that was fulfilled through Jesus Christ (John 6:45). The prophet prophesies that through Jesus Christ God will be the God of his people, a truth promised originally in God's covenant of grace with his people (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23) and ultimately fulfilled in the future complete kingdom (Rev. 21:3-7). This future dawning and completion of the kingdom through Jesus Christ will include complete forgiveness ("I will remember their sin no more") through a once-for-all-sacrifice-for-sin as opposed to repeated sacrifices under the old covenant (cf. Heb. 10:1-14).

What Jeremiah 31:31-34 unveils for us, then, is a metanarrative whose main movements are: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. This overarching record

of God's work through history shows that the gospel is not merely foretold or alluded to in the Old Testament, but is woven into its very fabric.⁷⁸

The over-arching message of the entire Old Testament, along with the structure and messages of its books, calls man to faith-fueled, God-glorifying obedience, an end that man left to himself could never fully accomplish, which is why the Old Testament drew the eyes of the Old Testament saint forward to a future Savior, one who would fully deal with man's sin, reconcile man to God, enable God's Spirit more fully to dwell in and change man, and thus make a new covenant between God and man—all of which would bring about the dawning of God's saving kingdom (cf. Gen. 3:15; 22:18; 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:11-16; Pss. 2; 22; 110; Is. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 52:13-53:12; Ez. 20:33-44; 36:26-27).

It is little wonder, then, that we find such a priority throughout the Old Testament placed upon trusting God. It is so crucial that God's people are defined as those who trust in him (Ps. 125:1-2). The kind of faith to which we are called is one in which we seek God with our whole heart because of his good, glorious plan for us, his people (Jer. 29:13). In times when we would be afraid of circumstances or men, we are called to trust in God and to praise his Word, realizing that men can do nothing to us that God does not allow (Ps. 56:3-4). More than that, we are called to trust in him at all times (Ps. 62:8) and to look to him for help since he is our covenant-loyal God who never sleeps and never allows any hardship to come our way that has not first passed through his hand and so we know nothing will ultimately undo us (Ps. 121). The Old Testament is unequivocal that it is better to trust in God than man (Ps. 118:8) or in any other means of help (Ps. 20:7).⁷⁹

What kind of life does such dependence upon God produce? We have touched upon this already. Let's be more explicit.

Dependence Upon God Leads To God-Glorifying Joy-Filled Obedience

First, we must see in Psalm 73:25-26 God's grace that produces dependence upon him among his people results in a strong love and affection for God, that which sometimes flies under the banner of the fear of the LORD—a way of looking at him that he produces within man's heart by his unmerited favor (Is. 25:3; Jer. 32:40).

This is a wisdom psalm, written by Asaph,⁸⁰ one that helps those who sing it delight and trust in God as good to his people (1), even when it appears that unbelievers prosper and avoid the struggles believers face—leading unbelievers to ignore the LORD and believers to think they pursue holiness in vain (2-15). Asaph affirms he gained a renewed perspective while he was worshiping together with others and was thus reminded of the end of the wicked as well as the future glory of the people of God (16-28). In the midst of stating his renewed perspective, he states his trust in God: he is always in the presence of God, who takes care of him, guides him with his counsel, and afterward will receive him into glory (23-24).

In the midst of this affirmation we find verses 25-26, which contain the psalmist's deep affection and desire for God. He makes an affirmation in 25a by means of a question, a device quite common in Hebrew.⁸¹ Literally, he asks: "Whom have I in heaven?" The "besides you" is added by the ESV, but most likely it is implied because of the preceding context, where he has stated he is continually with God, God holds him, guides him with counsel, and will receive him into glory (23-24). Asaph knows he has God, so the question, "Whom have I in heaven?" should be answered, "God". Exclusivity in regard to what the psalmist has in heaven is implied from the subsequent context. Every saint should see he has God and ultimately that is all he needs either in heaven or on earth, in

the present or in the future. Let everything else be taken away and God is more than enough! Because of this, he need not fret at the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous.

In 25b he makes another affirmation. Literally he writes: “and with you I desire nothing on earth.” In other words, God is all he desires while he is on earth. With God or in addition to God he needs nothing else. No doubt, Asaph had other lesser desires (to drink, to eat, to sleep, etc.), yet, his ultimate desire is set upon the sovereign God. Everything else pales in comparison, to the point of being almost nothing. This is how much he desires God. John Calvin helpfully comments:

The Psalmist shows more distinctly how much he had profited in the sanctuary of God; for being satisfied with him alone, he rejects every other object, except God, which presented itself to him.... [He] declares that he desires nothing, either in heaven or in earth, except God alone, and that without God, all other objects which usually draw the hearts of men towards them were unattractive to him. And, undoubtedly, God then obtains from us the glory to which he is entitled, when, instead of being carried first to one object, and then to another, we hold exclusively by him, being satisfied with him alone. If we give the smallest portion of our affections to the creatures, we in so far defraud God of the honor which belongs to him.... This is the only way of seeking him. The expression, “I have desired none other with thee,” amounts to this: I know that thou by thyself, apart from every other object, art sufficient, yea, more than sufficient for me, and therefore I do not suffer myself to be carried away after a variety of desires, but rest in and am fully contented with thee. In short, that we may be satisfied with God alone, it is of importance for us to know the plenitude of the blessings which he offers for our acceptance.⁸²

In verse 26 the psalmist takes his affirmation of God as his pleasure and treasure and applies it to the present discussion, which is never far from the reality of the afflictions of the righteous. Literally he writes: “My flesh and my heart fails, but the rock of my heart and my portion is God forever.” (author’s own translation) The ESV perhaps rightly translates, “may fail”. Yet, it could also simply be meant to say that currently given what Asaph has been considering, his heart is dejected. Yet, God is the high place and protection that gives safety and comfort to his heart and is also his portion forever.

Regarding “portion,” Willem VanGemerren writes: “In ancient Israel the priests enjoyed

a privileged status of having the Lord as their ‘share’ and ‘inheritance’ (Nu. 18:20). Though they were denied the privilege of land ownership, they, along with the Levites, were taken care of by the Lord’s tithes and offerings (Nu. 18:1-32). Similarly, the psalmist casts himself on the Lord for all his needs....”⁸³

In these two verses we find one of the clearest and most succinct statements in all of Scripture that a believer is to have exclusive and intense affection for God as his ultimate desire. Realities such as God’s continual presence, his guidance of us, our future glory, his ongoing strength and protection he provides at the very depth of our soul, and the fact he is our forever treasure all work together to help us conclude that God is greater and more valuable to us than all other people or things on earth!

When such affection is present in man by God’s grace, the Old Testament also teaches it leads to man’s desire to please God, to obey him. Knowing that such obedience must come by God’s gracious help (e.g. Psalm 23:3 reads: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”),⁸⁴ saints are moved to ask God for his empowerment to walk in his way. Consider some examples: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes... Lead me in the path of your commandments... Incline my heart to your testimonies... (Ps. 119:33-36); “Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me” (Ps. 119:133); “I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies” (Ps. 119:146); “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! Do not let my heart incline to any evil.... (Ps. 141:3-4).

It appears this gracious, empowering work of God within man was carried out by God’s Spirit under the Old Covenant (Judges 6:34; 1 Samuel 10:6; 16:13; Micah 3:8). Most likely this involved a permanent indwelling of the Spirit among some (1 Samuel 16:13)

and a coming and going of the Spirit among most true believers (e.g. Judges 15:14). Though the Old Testament prophesied a coming time when all kinds of believers, without distinction, would have a fuller work of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29), one by which his permanent dwelling would bring a deeper internal heart change whereby believers would be empowered even to a greater degree to walk in the ways of God (Ezek. 36:26-27), we dare not conclude that the Spirit of God was not working at all under the Old Covenant to empower saints to follow God, for he was!

Nevertheless, as glorious as the work of God's Spirit in the Old Covenant was, the people of God were being taught that a greater work of transformation was needed. This was a lesson, by the way, that was confirmed by experience. If man was truly to glorify God by following him through his gracious empowerment, something (or we should say "someone") greater was needed. As such, the correct posture by the completion of the Old Testament canon was one of leaning forward toward the future, anticipating by faith the coming of the Christ and the dawning of God's saving reign. Consider the words of the prophet Micah (4:1-2; 5:2-5a):

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, 2and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5And he shall be their peace.

So, we find a great surprise in that part of the Bible where we might be the most prone to moralize and focus only on principles and laws to help our self or someone else follow

God. Woven throughout it is the pattern of the gospel, namely that man was created to glorify God, yet fell into sin, and can only be saved and restored to his God-honoring purpose by God's gracious help. The Old Testament teaches, then, that man is not only totally dependent upon God, but in need of a Savior who will someday come and bring the ultimate good news that God's purposes can be completely fulfilled in and lived out through him. It is no wonder, then, that Paul wrote the "gospel of God...[was] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2) and that this side of the cross it can be asserted that all the Bible draws us in some way to Christ:

Don't you know, young man, that from every town, and every village, and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London...So from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis, Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road to Christ?...I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one...I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.⁸⁵

Few readers will be surprised to discover the same finding in the New Testament as we have in the Old, namely, that we find the God-glorifying, sinner-saving, saint-transforming gospel throughout its pages. Yet, the question remains: To what degree does the gospel truly permeate the very fabric of the last third of the Bible? To this we turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOSPEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Imagine seven-year-old twins, a brother and sister, who find their grandparents' wedding clothes while playing in their attic. The little girl eagerly puts on the dress and immediately begins to walk around and act as if she is getting married. The sleeves reach well down below her hands and the dress itself is so long she can barely walk in it. Though the brother is not as excited about playing dress up, sister finally coaxes him into putting on the suit. Likewise, the sleeves almost reach down to his knees, the jacket is dragging on the floor, and the trousers make it almost impossible for him to walk. They each are wearing the finest in apparel, but can barely navigate in it and really have no idea just how significant it all is.

This scenario pictures very well what it is like when a person is clothed with the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ (Is. 61:10-11; Zech. 3; Gal. 3:27). We have all we need to live a life of godliness in Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4), yet, we can barely walk around in it and certainly have no idea just how significant and powerful our new reality is.

This was true of me. In my mid-thirties I had served as a pastor for the better part of a decade, I had studied the New Testament extensively in both my undergraduate and graduate work, and had been a Christian for over twenty years. Yet, I had missed the central place the gospel plays in the New Testament. Thomas R. Schreiner explains what this message is and why it is sometime elusive:

God's purpose in all that he does is to bring honor to himself and to Jesus Christ. The N[ew] T[estament] is radically God-centered. We could say that the NT is about God magnifying himself in Christ through the Spirit. We could easily fail to see the supremacy of God and the centrality of Christ in the NT precisely because these themes are part of the warp and woof of the NT. Sometimes we fail to see what is most obvious, what is right before our eyes.⁸⁶

This central message sounds like a fulfillment of what we have just discovered about the Old Testament. It should because that is precisely what the New Testament is. We dare not miss this message or we will fail to understand this record of the New Covenant. Yet, more than missing the central message of the New Testament, we will miss the place the glorious gospel of God plays in our growth and transformation.

Years ago I was finishing up my doctoral studies and had a class on the book of Romans. It was during the weeks I was meticulously working my way through Paul's epistle that the truth hit me: The gospel is not just for the purpose of introducing the unsaved to Christ. It is also for the purpose of showing the Christian who they are in Christ and how the reality they are a new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) is the basis of their growth, the fuel for trusting in God's promises, the foundation of our joy, and the ever-flowing spring that feeds all life and ministry. It hit me that I am no longer Tom Barnes, the one who must be dominated with thus and such sin. Instead, I am Tom Barnes, the one who is in Christ! I am no longer the pastor, husband, father, brother, and son who just happens to have this personality, these circumstances, and that is just the way it is. "O, God has given me commands to live out as a Christian," I previously thought, "and it's nice what can happen, if I do them, but I won't go too far unless I am a super saint."

O how much I was like a little boy trying to walk around in a suit of clothes hanging to the ground, tripping over them, not really knowing what I had on (or who I had on!). Yet, God graciously began to do a work in me to help me grow into the clothes, to learn what I have in Christ, to see that I have all I need in Christ to know, love, and trust him, as well as live to his glory. That is what the Christian life is—putting on Christ and then

learning to walk around in him, in the gospel, until God takes us home or Christ returns. This is the Old-Testament-fulfilling, God-glorifying, Christ-accomplished, Spirit-empowered, man-redeeming, life-transforming, central message of the New Testament.

I will unfold this message in the same way I discovered it, by looking at the book of Romans. In the thought-flow of the book of Romans we will see that the New Testament not only carries on and completes the metanarrative of the Old, it carries on and completes each of the major themes of the gospel introduced in the Old. The benefit of looking primarily at Romans is not only that we can see how the gospel and its themes naturally derive from a single book (so we are not somehow forcing them upon Scripture), it is also because many throughout the history of the Church have thought no other biblical book better summarizes the central message of the Bible than this one.⁸⁷ As we discover the various gospel themes from this glorious letter, we will also call attention to other parts of the New Testament so we can see truly the gospel is part of its warp and woof.

The Gospel Is The Core Message

Most likely Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans in A.D. 57, while in Corinth during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3). The letter reveals at least three purposes for Paul's writing it. First, Paul desired to have the Roman Christians on board to help with his desired mission to Spain (15:18-24). Second, Paul wanted to have them involved in helping with aid to fellow believers in Jerusalem (15:25-29). In both cases, Paul desired to set forth the gospel he preached (cf. 1:5, 16; 16:26) as a means of bringing them on board and as a means of helping them to be unified with each other and behind him.

The subject of unity introduces the third purpose, for Romans also addresses Jew and Gentile tensions in the church (e.g. 2:12-16, 17-29; 3:9-31; 9:1-11:36; 14:1-23). The probable background is found in the edict of the emperor, Claudius, in A.D. 49 that expelled Jews from Rome, including Jewish Christians (cf. Acts 18:2). For five years, until the next emperor, Nero, rescinded the edict, the Roman church was exclusively Gentile. When Jews began to come back to Rome and into the church, tension arose over the proper view of the law and certain ethical issues, such as what food could or could not be eaten (ch. 14). By A.D. 57, the problems had escalated to the point that it warranted a lengthy letter from Paul. Yet, what does Paul do in this epistle to unify the factions? Does he exhort the readers to act differently? Certainly, he does that (e.g. 12:10-21; 13:8; 14:13, 20; 15:2, 7), but not merely that. Mainly, what Paul does is to teach them the gospel (ch's. 1-5) so they can understand how union with Christ and the transformation of the Spirit of Christ undergirds and fuels all God-glorifying tasks to which the Father calls them (ch's. 6-8). Once they understand this and are convinced from God's dealings with Israel that God truly does keep his promises (ch's. 9-11), Paul is able to exhort them, based upon God's gracious gospel resources, to live with each other in such a way that honors God (ch's. 12-16 [esp. 15:7]). No New Testament book shows with greater clarity that what God has done in his saints through Christ and what he continues to do stands behind, empowers, and makes possible his ethical commands.⁸⁸ When the reader of Romans understands this, it now makes sense that Paul is eager to preach the gospel to the church in Rome (1:15), even though he assumes most of them are believers (1:6-7). Paul knows that the gospel is not only what the unsaved need for salvation (1:16), it is what is needed for growth and God-glorifying obedience (1:1-5; 16:25-27).⁸⁹

God Does All For His Glory

Once we have seen that the gospel is so much at the core of the epistle to the Romans (and the rest of the New Testament), it should not be surprising to us that God's glory is the ultimate end for which God does all things, including salvation. After all, nothing puts on display God's glory more than his saving work as displayed in the gospel (e.g. Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

The epistle to the Romans unveils this ultimate end in two ways. To begin, the book opens and closes with Paul affirming that when people come to Christ, are continually strengthened by the gospel, and thus are empowered and directed to obey God, it brings him glory (1:1-5; 16:25-27). In typical Hebrew fashion, Paul demonstrates through this beginning and ending structure that the book (and Paul's mission) is ultimately about putting on display God's greatness in such a way that people come to worship him (e.g. 1:21-23; 3:23).⁹⁰ The inescapable conclusion is also that God's work among man and man's carrying out of God's will is all for his glory.

Additionally, Romans unveils God's ultimate end as his own glory by the way the primarily doctrinal portion of the book (chapters 1-11) ends in 11:33-36. What we find in Romans 11:33-36 is an exclamation of praise by Paul in response to the glorious gospel he has outlined so far in the epistle. These are glorious truths that we can comprehend to a point, but not fully, for they are beyond us. As such, Paul breaks out in powerful words of praise for God, "a doxology that appears as a counterpart to the silent refusal of idolatrous humanity to glorify the Creator and thankfully sing his praise (1:18-23). It likewise implicitly echoes Paul's blessing of Christ as God and sovereign over all things (9:1-5)."⁹¹ Paul asserts regarding God: "For from him and through him and to him are all

things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Rom. 11:36) This affirmation of praise makes clear that the gospel Paul has unpacked in chapters 1-11 is for the glory of God.

The rest of the New Testament also asserts God’s glory is the ultimate end of all things. All things exist for him (1 Cor. 8:6); the Son of God was sent into the world to glorify the Father through his person and the work of salvation he accomplished (Jn. 1:14, 18; 17:1-5; Rom. 3:26); God accomplished salvation in such a way that it reveals the helplessness of man and exalts God (1 Cor. 1:18-31; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 2:8-10); and God’s people are called to honor the Son and the Father (Mt. 5:16; Jn. 3:30; 5:19-24; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Faith-Fueled Joy-Filled Obedience

After Paul finishes his praise of God in Romans 11:33-36 for the glorious way he has saved man, the apostle turns in 12:1-2 to exhortation of his readers to God-honoring ethical living, all based upon what he has written in the first eleven chapters. This is clear from the word “Therefore” in 12:1. These two verses appear to give an overview of and introduction to the instruction that Paul will cover in chapters 12-16. This means that holiness (12:1; 13:11-14); unity and use of gifts (12:3-8); love, forgiveness, and humility (12:9-21; 13:8-10); zeal for serving the Lord (12:11); constancy in prayer (12:12); the willingness and empowerment to submit to authorities in a God-honoring way (13:1-7); working through differences in a way that glorifies God, benefits others, and follows the example of Christ (14:1-15:7); hope and joy (15:8-13); the willingness and empowerment to be involved in missions and mercy ministries (15:14-33); and strength for all to which God calls us (16:25) all arise from being united to Christ and his ongoing saving work in us.

Specifically, in Romans 12:1-2 Paul writes: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Paul instructs believers we are to give God our whole being, especially in a way that impacts the physical. This giving of our whole being to God pleases him, it is “reasonable” (a better rendering than “spiritual”), it involves the renewal of our mind as we think about the impact of the gospel in us, and it leads to our proving experientially the goodness of carrying out the will of God. The ground of all this change that flows from our presenting of our bodies to God consists of all the acts of mercy God performs in his people through Christ as Paul has outlined in Romans 1-11. We also dare not miss that Paul ended his long discussion of the gospel in Romans by breaking out in joyous worship (11:34-36) and then when he appeals for readers to present their body as a living sacrifice that involves obedience (as seen through the next three chapters), he speaks of this as “worship” (12:2). The good news brings about great faith and delight in our God, both of which produce obedience.

Here Paul agrees with the rest of the New Testament (e.g. Mt. 5:3-7:27; John 3:36; 15:1-16; Heb. 6:7-12; James 2:14-17; 2 Pt. 1:3-4) that flowing out of the saving work of Christ applied in a person there will be faith-fueled, joy-filled obedience.

Man’s Helplessness

Like in the Old Testament, Paul makes it clear in Romans that due to all men being sinners (3:10-18, 23; 5:12-19), none are able to please God (8:7-8). Since pleasing God necessarily includes something as foundational as believing in him (Heb. 11:6), this

helplessness extends to all areas of man's relation to God. Part of the renewal of the mind that is grounded in God's mercies (Rm. 12:1-2) involves humility, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (12:3) and also to live to build up others and not merely to please self (15:2). Such gospel-driven living is none other than becoming like Jesus Christ to his glory (8:29 [cf. also Phil. 2:5-15]).

Conclusion

More than merely seeing that the gospel is at the core and center of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the entire metanarrative of the Scriptures, we have discovered in these first four chapters there is not one inch of God's calling, including his ethical demands, ministry, hope, faith, love, and dealing with problems that do not flow out of the work God has done, is doing, and will do in his people in Jesus Christ. In other words, the Church, "which he obtained with the blood of his own" (Acts 20:28, author's own translation), is to be driven by this good news. We have learned that the idea the gospel is central to Scripture and the believer's growth is not imposed upon the Bible. Instead, it is woven throughout. That is why Tullian Tchividjian has written, "All good theology, in fact, is an exposition of the gospel."⁹²

To understand the saint is to be in step with the gospel in all things is crucial. Yet, it is not enough. Based upon the foundation laid in Part 1, we now want to turn in Part 2 to look specifically at what this looks like in key areas of the Church.

PART TWO
PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

CHAPTER FIVE

EVANGELISM IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMS THE GOOD NEWS

Some readers may think the title of this chapter is redundant. To talk about evangelism in step with the gospel is like writing on baseball in step with baseball. After all, by its very definition isn't evangelism all about the gospel? Yes, evangelism is by definition about the gospel. Yet, in the same way that there is good baseball played and bad, so there is both evangelism in step with the gospel and that which is not.

It has been my experience that much of evangelicalism (which also by definition is supposed to be about the gospel) has assumed their evangelism is in step with the gospel because they talk about Jesus and the cross, they call people to faith, and their techniques produce a certain amount of success, which means church attendance is increasing. Similarly, there are some who pursue techniques that will grow their church since they have not been experiencing success in this area. And, of course, there are those in evangelicalism-at-large who have grown tired of the emphasis on growth to the exclusion of other things such as community and justice. So, they have defined evangelism or gospel work in line with correcting this weakness. Regardless of what "flavor" church a person finds themselves in, if it views itself as evangelical, there is an expectation that somehow and in some way outreach should be happening, people impacted, and there should be people brought into the fold.

If we have been correct so far in our assessment of the Bible's teaching on the gospel, along with the gospel's centrality to the Scriptures, God's plan, and to the life of faith, there are some important and powerful implications for how we go about the gospel work that helps people receive and rest upon Christ alone for their salvation. We would expect

Scripture to teach that evangelism be done in a way that glorifies God, exalts Christ, focuses faith on the Savior and away from man, and relies upon the power of the Holy Spirit. That is exactly what we find.

Our main thrust in this chapter and following chapters will be to help God's people assess whether or not they are in step with the biblical gospel. For some individuals and for congregations as a whole this will require major adjustments. For others it will lead to fine-tuning.

When it comes to evangelism, these changes are based upon two key truths. The first truth, evangelism involves proclaiming the good news, will be examined in the rest of this chapter. We will save the second truth for Chapter 6.

To find out the evangelistic approach that is in step with the gospel, we turn to 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16, for no biblical text gives any more guidance in how to go about evangelism. One of the reasons Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth while he was in Ephesus, most likely in the spring of A.D. 55 (some three years after planting the church), was to address division that had arisen from various factions, each of which had given their allegiance to a different personality (1:10-17). Paul's response primarily shows that what matters more than anything is knowing and communicating God's wisdom, not the wisdom of man. As such, the elevation of men and man's creative techniques is not the goal of a truly gospel-driven saint or congregation.

Paul's repulsion toward elevation of men and man's wisdom does not exclude himself or his skill, for Paul knows he is not worthy of such honor, because he did not die for the people of God, the church is not baptized in his name (1:12-16), and in fact Paul was not even sent to baptize, but "to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom,

lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1:17). In other words, men’s salvation and God’s mission do not depend upon Paul. He is only a messenger. His goal is not to lift himself up, but to proclaim the message God uses to save man.

What happens when someone takes the focus off of Jesus Christ, his death, burial, and resurrection and puts it on the skill of man? Paul writes that in that case “the cross of Christ [is]...emptied of its power” (1:17). We need to note that “the cross of Christ” defines the gospel Paul is preaching (in 2:2 Paul words it this way: “Jesus Christ and him crucified” and in 1:24 it is simply “Christ”). Paul writes that the purpose Christ had in commissioning him as an apostle was to proclaim the gospel and to do it not with “words of eloquent wisdom” (lit. “not in wisdom of speech”). If it is true this phrase speaks of a rhetorical style that would be readily viewed by Greco-Romans as skillful speech, Paul is very clearly saying the main focus in ministry or outreach must never be to call attention to self or to make people think the preacher, teacher, or evangelist is really “with it” and so is worthy of our giving him attention.⁹³ In other words, Paul is denouncing a view of evangelism that puts too much emphasis upon the hearers coming to like Jesus because they first like us! “According to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel. It is a work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces for God’s message of mercy to sinners.”⁹⁴

Does this mean that any Christian engaged in evangelism has a license to be unnecessarily offensive or that how we relate, how we live, or whether or not we love, does not matter at all? Certainly, it does not! Not only is the believer called first and foremost to love others (Mt. 22:39), which means speech must heal, not destroy (Prov. 12:18), and it must build up, not corrupt (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6), how the believer lives

before the person evangelized can have an impact in whether or not they believe the gospel (Mt. 5:16; Jn. 13:34-35; 17:20-23; Phil. 2:14-15; 1 Pt. 3:1-2). That having been said, though, the kind of behavior that truly helps adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10) is that which clarifies the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 14:16), a truth that includes the reality that Jesus Christ is a great Savior who can save sinners. If he does not increase and the messenger decrease in the eyes of the hearer (John 3:30), then we have turned evangelism on its head. An approach to evangelism as just outlined is affirmed by many among evangelicalism:

We affirm that Jesus Christ commands his followers to proclaim the Gospel to all living persons, evangelizing everyone everywhere, and discipling believers within the fellowship of the Church. A full and faithful witness to Christ includes the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbor, without which the preaching of the Gospel appears barren.

“We deny that the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbors constitute evangelism apart from the proclamation of the Gospel.”⁹⁵

Why must the Church preach the gospel and do it in such a way that Christ and the work of Christ are center-stage and not personalities or programs? Paul explains in 1 Cor. 1:18: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (See also Rom. 1:16) Simply put, Paul teaches there are two kinds of people in the world when it comes to the gospel. First, there are those in whom the Spirit of God is working for them to understand and embrace the gospel and thus be saved (compare 1:18 with 2:6-16). For them, it is imperative they hear and understand the gospel so they can be saved (see also Romans 10:13-17). No one should want to cloud the gospel for the sake of such people, for once it is heard, understood, and embraced, this is how God powerfully works through the Spirit to save and change a person.

On the other hand, all persons who are dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3) and thus are choosing to stay in their rebellion and to reject God continually see the gospel as foolish. They may think for a time that the church is cool, that the way a particular pastor or Christian goes about ministry lacks the “archaic offence of other old time religion” they have encountered. Yet, when they ever do encounter a gospel that tells them life is ultimately about God, glorifying God, and being saved from one’s sin by the grace and mercy of God, rather than self (since we are helpless to save self), they will think this unworthy of their attention, not much less the allegiance of their heart (1 Cor. 2:14).

Bottom-line, then, Paul teaches that the only way a person will trust Christ as their Savior is for God to work in them through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since this is the case, the gospel must be clearly proclaimed. This is the work of evangelism.

Two implications arise from Paul here in 1 Corinthians 1:17-18. To begin, if the gospel is the power of God for salvation (1:18), then we must not change it. The Church will always be tempted to do this because, “The gospel of God and its true spiritual worship is boring and unintelligible to the unspiritual man.”⁹⁶ Yet, true love for God and for others will keep our eyes upon what will truly benefit them for eternity (cf. Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 13:6). As such, we will preserve the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5) however it is challenged and however much we are tempted to water it down. One of the chief temptations we face is to skip over or diminish the reality that the reason people need the gospel is we are sinners who face God’s judgment.⁹⁷ Yet, without this truth, the sinner does not see the gospel as such good news and does not see his need for it. We will say more about this preparatory news for the gospel shortly.

The second implication that arises from what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:17-18 is that we must not assume the gospel. It is mankind's natural bent to seek for salvation by works apart from the grace of God through Christ. This, coupled with a tendency to want to fit in and not rock the boat can lead some people to speak some of the Christian talk, do some of the Christian stuff, but have no concept of the gospel and/or not to appropriate the gospel through faith and repentance. Therefore, we must never assume the gospel with anyone. We must regularly come back to its many glorious facets in regard to its truths and outcomes.⁹⁸ Mark Stiles challenges us with these words: "Losing the gospel doesn't happen all at once, it's much more like a four generation process...:

The gospel is accepted—

The gospel is assumed—

The gospel is confused—

The gospel is lost—"⁹⁹

Stiles concludes: "The generation that assumes the gospel is the generation that is most responsible for the loss of the gospel."¹⁰⁰

In these implications we have introduced very important material to communicate in the task of evangelism that goes beyond the core gospel message itself. Why is this necessary? It is true that at the core of evangelism is proclaiming what God has accomplished to save sinners, namely the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Yet, as evidenced in Scripture, there is more to the entire process of biblical evangelism than merely stating this message. People must know why they need to respond to this message, i.e. they have sinned against the Creator of the universe and this rebellion has separated them from his blessing and left them under his wrath (Gn.

1:1-3:19; Is. 59:2; Rom. 1:18; 3:23; 6:23; Rev. 20:14-15). What is more, there is a necessary response to this gospel: faith and repentance (Acts 16:31; 26:20), so people must be called to this response (Acts 2:38; 17:30). This faith is more than mere mental assent (James 2:19), but involves grief over sin and truly seeing with affection the glory of God in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). People must also understand, as we saw in chapter one, that a changed life necessarily flows from salvation, becoming one of its key indicators (Mt. 7:24-27; 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 13:5; Titus 2:11-15). Finally, the evangelist must see certain things on his part are helpful when they accompany evangelism, such as his own life change (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; Phil. 2:14-15; 1 Pt. 3:1-2) and prayer (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:2-4). This last point is particularly important for the gospel-driven evangelist. We must grasp that the work of salvation is ultimately the work of God (John 1:13; 3:8) and fruitful evangelism takes place by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29), through the work of the Spirit (Acts 1:8) and the Son (Mt. 28:20), and in response to prayer (John 14:12-14).

An analogy will help drive home how the entire task of evangelism, with the gospel message at the center, must include more. Suppose you have worked in a large office building for years at a job that you have enjoyed. You come and go everyday into and out of a safe comfortable environment without anything out of the ordinary happening. Then one afternoon members of the local fire station come into your particular office and tell you, "Follow us, you can get out of the building this way, we have already checked it out and it is safe." You are in the middle of an important project, so the thought of leaving at this moment is not pleasant and it is certainly not good news. "Why should I leave the building?" you ask. "I have to get this job done by the end of the week. I'll just stay

here.” “No, you do not understand,” one of the fire fighters responds, “There is a large fire on the east side of the building moving very rapidly this way. The alarm system and sprinkler system failed to function properly. Let me show you.”

At this point the firefighter takes out his smart phone and shows you a live shot of smoke and flames. Now you know there really is a fire and so you must act. You also now know the statement, “Follow us, you can get out of the building this way, we have already checked it out and it is safe” is wonderful good news, especially in light of what you know about the construction and lay-out of the building, that it would be easy to get lost on your way out and perhaps walk right into the fire if you were disoriented by smoke. Finally, you also know that trusting in the good news of the fire fighter will change your life. Without trusting in it, there is no life. By trusting in it, you will have a vastly different future than if you do not, namely you will have hope and life.

In this analogy, we see that at the core of rescuing people is the message of the good news (the gospel). Yet, it is not seen as good news unless the hearer knows something of the layout of the building (there is a God, he has created, he will not overlook sin) and that there truly is a fire (we are sinners facing God’s judgment), a fact that is trusted because we see the truth of the smoke and flames (God’s Spirit working through prayer). We are helped in trusting the message because of who tells it to us (one’s life can make a difference in helping confirm the gospel). We are called to response (faith and repentance) and whether or not we truly trust the good news is verified in whether or not we move out of the building (the life change that evidences true conversion).

Of course, no analogy is perfect, but in this we see that there is no evangelism without clearly proclaiming what has been done by God through Christ. This is the core. Yet, we also see that there are other very important aspects of the overall task.

As Paul continues in 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16 to provide his description of how God works to save people in a way that elevates his wisdom and puts man's in proper perspective, there are a number of things he communicates about the manner in which evangelism should take place. In essence, he asserts it should be shaped by the gospel. We will outline how that is so in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

EVANGELISM IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL IS SHAPED BY THE GOOD NEWS

In Chapter 5 we were reminded that evangelism in step with the gospel involves proclaiming the good news. We learned that though this may sound too elementary even to mention, nevertheless, the Church often loses sight of it. So, it was good we covered that ground. In this chapter, as we continue to unpack 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16, we move beyond the need to proclaim the gospel as the content of evangelistic endeavors, to see that the gospel pattern we have identified throughout the whole of Scripture ought to give shape to the methods of our outreach. We see this in four ways.

Evangelism Should Be God-Exalting And Christ-Focused

True biblical, gospel-driven evangelism cannot have as its focus the exaltation of personalities or local congregations with the purpose of the lost coming to like the personalities or the congregation so much that they will then “like Jesus”. Such so-called evangelism runs the risk of people trusting in the messenger(s) more than in Christ. Also, such so-called evangelism has very little in common with what we see in Scripture. “No man can give at once the impressions that he himself is clever and that Jesus Christ is mighty to save.”¹⁰¹ No where is this seen with greater clarity than in Paul’s teaching of 1 Corinthians 1:19-2:5.

After discovering in 1 Cor. 1:18 the God-exalting, man-humbling nature of the gospel that divides mankind into two categories (those who are perishing and those who are being saved), Paul unveils in 1 Cor. 1:19-20 the pattern for this way of God working

through the gospel was established in the Old Testament. Paul writes: “For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’

20Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Paul’s point is that it has already been established that God works to judge and save in such a way he humbles man. When it comes to God’s wisdom, it is as if the intellectuals, the philosophers, the religiously sophisticated, the great communicators, and the gatekeepers of the world have nothing really to offer when it comes to salvation.

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul moves into the purpose for which God has ordered the world to function the way it does in regard to the gospel. Paul writes: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” In other words, the ultimate cause of the world not coming to know God by means of its own wisdom was God’s skill at taking his infinite knowledge and using it to glorify himself.¹⁰² In that wisdom and in accordance with his eternal divine pleasure he has decreed that through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified (what natural man sees as folly) man is saved. The division in the world into saved and unsaved is not something that takes God by surprise. Rather, he decreed it would take place in this manner. It has a God-glorifying ultimate purpose.

In verse 22 Paul introduces a secondary cause of the way things are in the world: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom”. In other words, those who are lost remain in their lost states because many of them demand more proof even than what God has already given through Christ (there will never be enough for them) and many of them just

simply conclude that a crucified Savior does not measure up to the standards of what they believe to be true wisdom. So, here we see the responsibility of sinners behind the way things are.

Because of this sinful state, when the gospel is preached, there are two very different reactions men give—reactions that form the two main categories of lost and saved mankind. In verses 23-24 Paul writes: “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” And, as a result of these two reactions that stem from both man’s sinful rebellion (22) and ultimately God’s sovereign plan (21), God has displayed the superiority of his wisdom over that of the world (25): “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Next, Paul proves what he has just written by encouraging the Corinthians to look at their own experience. Though there may have been some among them who had status and power, the reality is that not many of them came from such a background since God has chosen to work through a humbling means (the cross) and among people characterized as foolish, weak, low, i.e. the “have-nots” or “nothings”. Paul writes in verses 26-28:

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

As Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, it is only with great difficulty the rich enter the kingdom. It happens (Mt. 19:26), but since men must come to see their true status without Christ as foolish, weak, low and really having nothing of what is truly needed, not many with riches or status come to Christ since they think themselves wise, strong, high, and having all they need.

Why ultimately does God work in this way? Paul answers this in 1 Cor. 1:29-31: “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **30**And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31**so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” Not only does Paul tie this purpose back into Old Testament Scripture by quoting Jeremiah 9:24 in verse 31, but he makes it clear in his thought flow that God has so ordered salvation that it leaves man in a state in which he cannot boast or take credit for salvation and therefore God gets the glory. In commenting on this text, Jonathan Edwards has written: “What God aims at in the disposition of things in the affair of redemption...[is] that man should not glory in himself, but alone in God...”¹⁰³

Yet, what impact should this teaching of 1 Cor. 19-31 have upon how we go about evangelism? Paul answers that question in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 by way of addressing the manner in which he ministered among the Corinthians:

*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2**For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3**And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4**and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5**that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Paul begins here by asserting he avoided a way of communicating among them that would readily be seen as successful. The words “lofty speech or wisdom” are technical terms of the day that spoke of communication methods thought by the masses to be engaging and skillful.¹⁰⁴ Instead of Paul coming among the Corinthians in a manner that would elevate him in their minds and make them think how wise, knowledgeable, and adept at communication he was, he wanted them to see that the only knowledge he deemed important for salvation was Jesus Christ and him crucified (1-2). As a result, Paul

was not afraid to display his own weaknesses, since their salvation did not depend upon him having it all together (3).¹⁰⁵ Instead of making himself look good, Paul desired to preach the gospel in such a way that the Spirit confirmed its truth and that the Corinthians understand it was God's power working through his Spirit by means of his Word that saved them (4-5). Therefore, there is no room for them to exalt man or man's methods as decisive.

So, bottom-line, as a remedy to the Corinthians' divisions that stemmed from overemphasis upon personalities and man's abilities, Paul has shown that true biblical, gospel-driven evangelism exalts God, focuses upon Jesus Christ, and trusts in the power of the Spirit to work through the gospel, as opposed to winning others by the genius of man.¹⁰⁶

Some of us have rarely seen evangelism done in the way Paul describes in this passage because we have grown up and lived "swimming in the waters" of man-centered, creativity-focused outreach. Whether it has been the parading of a newly professed Christian sports star before the masses as confirmation Jesus is cool and you can be cool too or the blasting of youth at a youth conference with a barrage of video images to make sure they understand that Christians are technologically-savvy, most of us have seen (or been part of) plenty of outreach that is not in step with the gospel, that elevates man and, oh yeah, along the way, talks about Jesus and the cross. Some man-centered versions are even more sophisticated. When a church trusts in its organizational prowess so it can impress young professionals with the idea Christians are certainly "with it," and Jesus is "with it" also, and in this way can "win" them to Jesus, the man-centeredness may not be as apparent, yet it is still there.

I do not want to be misunderstood to mean evangelism in step with the gospel cannot utilize testimonies, technology, or cannot think through how a congregation can be organized. The problem is when we trust in these methods to be what “wins” people or when the methods become so pervasive they drown out the gospel of the crucified Lord.

I have now pastored long enough to see several trends emerge to reach others, all the way from the well-told story to the professionally-organized church to the tech-savvy service. When our trust is in such human ingenuity, our tendency is to blunt the sharp edge of the gospel and preaching on sin, as well as to put prayer in the back of the bus.¹⁰⁷

And I know from experience what we tend to create in such settings is an inordinate affection for a human leader or a ministry approach, rather than a strong central focus upon Jesus Christ. We also create a people who are very slow to teach the gospel to friends, co-workers, and family since what really matters is relationship and testimony. “Besides,” we conclude, “We don’t want to risk others thinking us old-fashioned because that means they will think Jesus old-fashioned.” So, we keep on “living a good testimony” before people and believing, contrary to what Paul affirms about the necessity of gospel proclamation (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:23-24), such is sufficient. So, in opposition to what much of evangelicalism thinks “works,” making much of people does not serve true evangelism and it empties the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17).

When I was a new pastor, fresh out of seminary, I fell into the trap of trying to win people to Jesus by first winning them to me and also through an inordinate trust in methods. Though the results were positive from a human perspective (people really liked me), I soon learned I was not being faithful to biblical evangelism. When I changed both my heart and my approach to show that what really matters is “Jesus Christ and him

crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), I found that on the one hand, some people were offended, didn’t like the message, and went elsewhere. Yet, on the other hand, when people professed faith in Jesus Christ, they were more apt to see the power is in God and not in me or the church (1 Cor. 2:5). Such Christ-centered evangelism should never have the goal of offending people as if that is a “badge of honor”. Nevertheless, as Pastor Mark Dever asserted in a sermon on evangelism, if people are not sometimes offended at the gospel we proclaim, we are probably not proclaiming the biblical gospel.¹⁰⁸

So, in our evangelism exalt God, focus upon Jesus Christ, not man, and trust in the Spirit to work through the gospel, not our ingenuity.

Evangelism Should Rely On God’s Power Not Man’s

This next point follows closely on the heels of what we have just seen, that God has decreed salvation take place in a way that exalts his wisdom and power. As such, the evangelist must trust God’s Spirit to work through God’s methods, not through humanly-designed approaches.

Paul teaches this truth as he continues to correct the Corinthians in 2:6-16. The apostle does not want to be misunderstood to say that true evangelists do not impart any wisdom. They do, but not the same wisdom to which the world turns. He writes in verse 6: “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.”

The term “mature” most likely is a term the Corinthians used of themselves, so Paul includes it here to speak of all believers, those whom God has saved and is maturing.¹⁰⁹ Paul affirms the wisdom proclaimed by true ministers of the gospel is not from or characterized by this age, i.e., a way of thinking that is opposed to God and apart from

the work of his Spirit in them. It is also not from or characterized by what we might call the gate-keepers of culture, those who have status, power, and influence (cf. 1 Cor. 1:28). These rulers are not only doomed to pass away due to God's judgment, but their so-called wisdom or thoughts about what is important will soon be forgotten.

In contrast, Paul says that true ministers of the gospel proclaim a wisdom which man cannot know apart from God's revelation of it, a wisdom that is not transient, but eternal. After all, in eternity-past God determined this wisdom would be the way of man's salvation and would culminate in the glory of saints—namely their perfection in the new heaven and earth. He writes in 1 Cor. 2:7: “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” Paul's point is not only to imply the foolishness of following the transient wisdom of transient men under the judgment of God instead of God's eternal wisdom that has such a man-benefiting and God-honoring end, but also to introduce the reality that this wisdom cannot be fully-grasped apart from God's work in man.

Paul clarifies this point in verses 8-10a: “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9**But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’—**10**these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.” The point here is clear: Men, including the influential, do not come to see the wisdom of God in Christ left to themselves, as is evidenced in the reality they crucified Jesus Christ.

The reader should not miss that in order to come to value and grasp God's wisdom, he must love God and have the help of the Holy Spirit. Clearly in context the work of the

Spirit is what is decisive. Yet, why is the Spirit necessary to understand the wisdom, the things that come from God? In 10b-12 Paul gives the first half of the answer. It is because the Spirit knows the thoughts of God: “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11**For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12**Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” In a similar way that a man’s inner being, his spirit, comprehends that man’s thoughts, so with God, his Spirit, knows his thoughts. As such, when God’s Spirit works in a person to regenerate them and illuminate them in regard to the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ crucified, the end result is an understanding of those things freely given by God. This wisdom, in other words, is not earned and it does not come only to a select or elite group of very intelligent people. It comes to those whom the Spirit of God unconditionally and effectively calls unto salvation (Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2 Tim. 1:9).

In light of how God sovereignly works in a person unto salvation, there is a certain way Paul says that Christians go about evangelism. In verse 13 he explains: “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”¹¹⁰

Next, Paul tells what the source of these words is not. Literally, he writes: “not with taught of-man’s-wisdom-words” (author’s own translation). Paul is teaching that in the process of telling men how to come to know God, true gospel heralds do not use teachings that are words whose source is in human wisdom. Instead, they speak these things “with” or “by means of words taught from the Spirit” (author’s own translation).

The message that is used of God to save sinners, is “words taught from the Spirit”. It is the message that comes from the Spirit, i.e. the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), the core of which is the gospel (Eph. 1:13).

In addition to Paul revealing what true Christian evangelists proclaim, he also explains the manner in which they proclaim it: “Interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”¹¹¹ Paul asserts that as a true evangelist shares the gospel that is from the Spirit, he explains those things that come from the Spirit. “Spiritual things” does not refer to some esoteric knowledge. It simply connotes those things that come from the Holy Spirit, namely the Word of God revealed by the Spirit, the core of which is the gospel.

Finally, Paul unveils the people who can understand and receive these things: “to those who are spiritual”. “The word *spiritual* which Paul uses here always has the sense, “connected with, or inspired by, the Holy Spirit. The word is used of all the members of the church, not only those endowed with special gifts.... *Spiritual* are all Christians because they have received the Holy Spirit.”¹¹² Though Paul seeks to proclaim Christ to as many men as he can (cf. Col. 1:28)—especially those who have never heard of him (Rom. 15:20-21)—the ones who receive the message and delight in it are those who have the Spirit working in them in an effective way to save them in accordance with the sovereign will of God (1 Cor. 1:24; 2:7, 12).

When we understand what Paul is teaching in these verses, we come to understand even more why Paul rejected certain methods of communication that exalted man and not Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). The means God uses to save sinners is he decides in his sovereign grace to call certain sinners to him by his Spirit and working through the Spirit-revealed and Spirit-illuminated gospel. Those who are continually perishing (1 Cor. 1:18), that is,

those who continually see the gospel as a stumbling block and folly (1 Cor. 1:23), are those who do not have the Spirit working in them. If this is the case, why would a Christian herald want to change the gospel? Those folks are not going to accept the gospel because of the hardness of their hearts (1 Cor. 1:22). Yet, the unadulterated gospel is what the Spirit uses to save those whom Paul terms “the elect” elsewhere (Rom. 8:33; 2 Tim. 2:10). We see, then, why the Christian herald should proclaim the gospel in a manner that relies on God’s power working through his Spirit and not on man’s power.

Yet, Paul reveals a second reason for this approach to evangelism. It is not only because the Holy Spirit must be the one to give men new life and open up to them the Spirit-revealed truths of God. It is also because man is incapable of embracing the truth of the gospel on his own. In 1 Cor. 2:14-16 Paul writes: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **15**The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. **16** ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

Since Paul is contrasting the “natural person” (14) with “those who are spiritual” (13), “the natural person” is the one without the Spirit working in him to give him new life. Of such a person Paul writes that he “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (14). Paul is certainly not saying that such a person cannot understand at all the data of the gospel. Paul’s point is that such a person does not judge this message to be a glorious truth (see 2 Cor. 4:4-6), one that he needs, one that is his salvation, the most important good news he could ever hear.

The fact that Paul goes on to give the reason for the natural person's rejection of the gospel as this, "for they are folly to him," lets us know he is speaking of the kind of lack of acceptance we saw in 1 Cor. 1:18-23, namely, a rejection of the message when it is heard and understood enough to deem it foolish. That we are on the right track is seen in the subsequent parallel statement by Paul: "And he is not able to know, because it is spiritually discerned." (Author's translation) The verb translated "know" has been used elsewhere in this section to refer to true and intimate knowledge of God (1:21). The verb translated "discerned" is used elsewhere by Paul to speak of examining something or someone in such a way as to ask questions with the goal of coming to a judgment or assessment.¹¹³ Paul's point, then, is that the man who does not have the Spirit working in him in a saving way will never come to know the gospel, these things revealed by the Spirit, in a true and intimate way, i.e. in such a way that he comes to a positive assessment. That only happens with the person in whom the Spirit is sovereignly working to save (see verses 10-13).

Having established the inability of the natural unregenerate man to see the gospel positively and to accept it, Paul concludes this part of his argument in verses 15-16 by contrasting the person regenerated by the Spirit of God with the one who is not and doing it in such a way as to show that the former can properly assess and discern all things as they pertain to the gospel, whereas the latter person does not have the ability properly to assess the former person.¹¹⁴ Paul refers to Isaiah 40:13 in verse 16 to confirm once again that a person cannot come to understand the mind of God on his own, apart from the Spirit. This is why the unsaved, unregenerate man will never assess the gospel or the Christian accurately. Yet, at the same time, the Christian, the one who has been

regenerated by the Spirit, has the mind of Christ (16). In other words Christians have “a particular mode of thinking and [discernment]”¹¹⁵ that comes from or belongs to Christ. Since in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9), we should not be surprised that because we have Christ and the mind of Christ as believers we would therefore have the mind of God. What is more, those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), whom we have already learned communicates to us and helps us understand the thoughts of God (1 Cor. 2:10-14).

Paul here is making the case that the way God works to save people is by his Spirit working through his Word. Because of this, the Christian who desires to see people trust Jesus Christ as Savior ought to engage in evangelism in a way that relies upon God’s power working through the gospel and not man’s ability or ingenuity. There are a number of applications we could draw from this point. Let me focus on two of the most important.

First, we should utilize methods that highlight God’s power, not man’s ability. This, of course, begins with a change of thinking from that of seeking to get neutral people who are able to choose Christ to make a decision to that of seeing spiritually dead people raised unto new life by God’s Spirit effectively calling them through the preaching of the gospel and regenerating them so they repent and receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation.¹¹⁶ If we do not understand this, we will end up being man-centered pragmatists.

*We have not been watchful enough about the condition of people’s hearts before we ask them to act, because with the right method or program [so we think], the condition of a person’s heart isn’t that important. We have become pragmatists.... I’m convinced that the greatest obstacle to healthy evangelism is pragmatism.... Pragmatic evangelism is ‘doing’ evangelism in a way that elevates success and method over anything else. It becomes the business of evangelism.*¹¹⁷

Specifically, this means that the sky is not the limit when it comes to the ways we go about our evangelism. One of the areas we miss this badly in the United States is how we go about the evangelism of youth. For 2-3 generations now evangelicalism-at-large has thought that the more fun our youth can have, the more “with-it” we can appear in our methods and our use of technology, the more the youth will think Christians (and Christ) not old fashioned and somehow they will embrace some form of Christianity. Everything from smaller youth gatherings that have little or no emphasis on the gospel (but have great games), to larger stadium events that bombard teens with one fast-paced song and video-image after another, to the very-anti-biblical sense among parents that the only way to “reach their youth” is to have someone else do it because parents are not “cool enough,” we have traded the gospel for pragmatism. As a result, our sons and daughters have not only gone away to the university not really understanding the gospel or resting in Christ for salvation, they also have been taught, by implication, that the Church is not “where it is at”. So, on their own, unregenerate (though having made a profession of faith when younger), and having been given false impressions of what it means to know and follow Christ, it is no wonder that so many struggle and “walk away from the faith.” The answer is to return to a view of evangelizing our children and anyone else that is in step with the biblical gospel, as Paul has outlined it here in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.¹¹⁸

Second, flowing from what Paul has taught about the necessity of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel and man’s inability to assess the gospel positively and to trust Christ, we must be devoted to prayer for the unsaved. Since the truths of the gospel can only be assessed positively as God shines in the heart of man so he sees the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ (Acts 16:14; 2 Cor. 4:6) through the Spirit (John

3:1-8; 1 Cor. 2:14) and since men are born of the will of God (John 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:12), it is very clear that we must pray for the unsaved that they would repent and trust Jesus Christ. Jesus set the example for this when he prayed to the Father that Lazarus be raised (John 11:41-42). Paul taught this when he set forth prayer for others as one of the key pieces of armor Christians put on (Eph. 6:18) and when he asked the Colossians to pray for him and his colleagues as they preached the gospel (Col. 4:2-4). What is more, this is also affirmed by the reality faith (Acts 18:27; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 2:8; 3:12; Phil. 1:29) and repentance (Dt. 30:6; Jer. 32:40; 2 Tim. 2:25; 1 John 4:9) are gifts from God that have been purchased for the elect by Christ (Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:21; 2 Pet. 1:1) and applied by the Spirit (Titus 3:5).

J. I. Packer has aptly reminded us:

Prayer...is a confessing of impotence and need, an acknowledging of helplessness and dependence, and an invoking of the mighty power of God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In evangelism...we are impotent; we depend wholly upon God to make our witness effective; only because He is able to give men new hearts can we hope that through our preaching of the gospel sinners will be born again. These facts ought to drive us to prayer.¹¹⁹

God has decreed that he responds to prayer to meet our needs (e.g. Mat. 7:7-11) and one of the reasons is because it highlights his power and sufficiency to his honor and it reminds man of his insufficiency and lack of ability. Psalm 50:15 sets forth this foundation: “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Evangelism Should Be Teaching-Oriented

The picture we have given of evangelism in this and the previous chapter is one in which there is information to share. That information centers around the gospel of the crucified savior, it includes matters that prepare a person for understanding why they

need to be saved, it includes explaining why God is the only one who can save, that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ, how the work of Jesus Christ is applied (faith and repentance), how the gospel shapes the life of the believer, and it includes helping a convert see that assurance comes only as he sees his heart and life change. What this means is that the way an individual Christian or a whole congregation goes about the work of evangelism should not be in isolation from the life of the congregation, nor must it be thought that the one time presentation of the gospel is the best and only evangelism there is. Too much of the Church has adopted this approach.

*Evangelism of the modern type...seems to presuppose a conception of the life of the local church as an alternating cycle of converting and consolidating. Evangelism almost acquires the character of a periodic recruiting campaign. It becomes an extraordinary and occasional activity, additional and auxiliary to the regular functioning of the local congregation.*¹²⁰

Certainly, there will be times when a Christian can only share the gospel once with someone or give them a book that will explain the gospel.¹²¹ Yet, in all situations where possible, the work of evangelism should encompass the full-orbed approach we just outlined. In other words, it should be teaching-oriented. “Evangelism must...be conceived as a long-term enterprise of patient teaching and instruction, in which God’s servants seek simply to be faithful in delivering the gospel message and applying it to human lives, and leave it to God’s Spirit to draw men to faith through this message in his own way and at his own speed.”¹²² This is why we should not drive too great a wedge between what we call evangelism and discipleship. Though God always knows when a person passes from death to life, we do not. The need before and after conversion is the same: “preach the word...do the work of an evangelist.” (2 Tim. 4:1-5)

This was the approach that Paul took.¹²³ We have already seen in 1 Cor. 2:13-14 that what Paul undertook to do was explain the truths the Spirit has revealed so that those who

are regenerated by the Spirit can understand and embrace them through faith. This is also the approach we see exemplified by Paul in Acts whether he was teaching in a synagogue for a few weeks (17:2-3), speaking the gospel during a one-time opportunity (16:13-14; 17:22-34), or teaching over an extended period of two years (19:9-10).

It is the approach Jesus taught his disciples in the parable of the teacher (Mt. 13:52): “Every teacher, who has been made a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his storehouse what is new and what is old.” (author’s own translation) It is the commission Jesus has given to the Church (Mt. 28:19-20): “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20***teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (emphasis added)

Finally, it is the way Paul told Timothy those who opposed the young leader and who did not grasp the gospel, would come to understand it and repent (2 Tim. 2:24-26): “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, *able to teach*, patiently enduring evil, **25** *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth*, **26**and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (emphasis added)

When a congregation is practicing evangelism in step with the biblical gospel, they will not only be looking for as many opportunities as possible to proclaim Christ (Col. 1:28), they will also find ways to bring unbelievers into situations where they can witness how Christians treat each other with a love that is very different than what they see elsewhere (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23), where unbelievers can see an outstanding hope among

believers and be moved to ask questions (1 Peter 3:15), and where they can be taught the gospel (1 Cor. 2:13; 14:13-25).

Preachers and counselors [as well as any Christian] will be wisest if, while stressing the urgency of seeking Christ and becoming a true and thorough Christian, they funnel enquirers into catechetical classes, nurture groups, and church worship, highlighting these involvements as the proper way to express sincerity of contrition and commitment, rather than letting it seem that immediate 'decision', as an isolated act, is all that is needed to settle the issues of eternity for ever.... So the provision of structures for further instruction and help towards conversion is a matter of necessity....¹²⁴

What this looks like is something like this. A Christian gets to know an unbeliever at work or in the neighborhood and to build a relationship with them. In the course of that relationship discussions take place about life and difficulties and so the Christian (who has been praying toward this end, Col. 4:2-4) looks for opportunities both to share how Christ has changed them, as well as to explain the gospel. In the process, they also invite them to a small group or home Bible study they have where they can see Christians interact with each other,¹²⁵ and they also invite them to worship services of their congregation where the Word is preached. God will use different scenarios with different people (some may come to the worship service first, others may be very leery of this for a long time, some may come to a small group right away and others simply continue in the one-on-one relationship with the Christian for sometime), but the goal of the Christian is to explain the gospel while praying for the Spirit to work in the heart of the person and, as much as possible, do this in the context of the people of God.

Evangelistic Effectiveness Should Not Be Judged By Results, But By Faithfulness

This one final manner in which our evangelism is shaped by the gospel, as set forth in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16, has been implied from the beginning. Paul has corrected the Corinthians' division that is based upon inordinately lifting up different leaders (cf. 1

Cor. 1:12). The Apostle has redirected them toward a view of evangelism and ministry that has been modeled by him, avoids man-centered approaches that would easily win approval at the expense of the gospel, and that focuses upon the Christ-centered gospel driven home into the hearts of the elect by the Spirit of God. Many will reject its message (1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:8-9, 14), so the effectiveness of the evangelist cannot be judged simply by looking at the rejection of the message by many. Rather, evangelism should be judged by whether or not the Christian is proclaiming the eternal gospel (1 Cor. 2:7; Gal. 1:8-10), that is, the gospel revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 2:10-13a; 2 Tim. 2:15), and accurately explained (1 Cor. 2:13b).¹²⁶

Elsewhere, Paul makes it clear that proclamation of the Word of God, the core of which is the gospel, is a great deal of the ministry faithfulness to which God calls his servant.

He writes in 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*¹²⁷

May we also faithfully preach the word, do the work of an evangelist, pray for God to grant repentance and faith, and leave the results in his hands!¹²⁸

CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWTH AND CHANGE IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

What we have discovered so far in our journey is that the gospel shapes the entire Bible because every biblical location we visit has been colored by it—namely that God does all for his glory and the way man comes also to live for this purpose is to be saved by the grace of God from his idolatrous sin so that he can be transformed into one who loves and obeys God as a result of trusting the one who has first saved him.

In the last two chapters we discovered there are ramifications arising from the gospel for how we go about the task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ crucified to the unsaved, a glorious work we often label evangelism. Now, in this chapter we make the same discovery for how a Christian grows and changes.

In the course of our tour, we have already been in this field picking up handfuls of grain dropped here and there. The bits and pieces we have gleaned have taught us that all a Christian does is to be in step with the gospel (Gal. 2:14), for the gospel is not merely for the unsaved to come to Christ, it is for believers also (Rom. 1:15), since it is by the gospel saints in Christ are strengthened for the purpose of obeying God out of faith to his glory (Rom. 16:25-27; Gal. 2:20). We have even ventured far enough into the stalks of grain to see that the saving work of Jesus Christ applied to his people through the Spirit secures the transforming presence of the Spirit so that the one who is saved turns from ungodliness and worldly passions to “live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives,” and to be a people “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14; 3:5-6).

Now, we want to go beyond gleaning this field to a full harvest of it. Our desire now is to gain a clear picture of gospel-driven growth. What we discover is that this kind of

progress in holiness involves trusting in and acting upon five consequences of the good news, all of which should readily make sense to us, given the ground we have covered.¹²⁹ As we interact with this material we should keep in view both how we grow and also the laying of a foundation for how we will help others grow.

We Must Believe The Gospel Is Also For Christians

We need spend little time on this point, since we have established it so strongly already. Yet, it is necessary to note it in a chapter on Christian growth. When the Christian is not aware that following God's commands is the result of love that arises from Christ-wrought, Spirit-produced faith (Gal. 5:6, 22-23), in other words the gospel, then the most likely effect will be either arrogant moralism on the one hand or licentious carelessness on the other. Tim Keller explains:

[Writing in the third century, Christian leader and author] Tertullian said, "Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors." ...there were two basic false ways of thinking, each of which "steals" the power and the distinctiveness of the gospel from us by pulling us "off the gospel line" to one side or the other.... These "thieves" can be called moralism or legalism on the one hand, and hedonism or relativism on the other hand. Another way to put it is: the gospel opposes both religion and irreligion. On the one hand, "moralism/religion" stresses truth without grace, for it says that we must obey the truth in order to be saved. On the other hand, "relativists/irreligion" stresses grace without truth, for they say that we are all accepted by God (if there is a God) and we have to decide what is true for us. But "truth" without grace is not really truth, and "grace" without truth is not really grace.... Any religion or philosophy of life that de-emphasizes or loses one or the other of these truths, falls into legalism or into license and either way, the joy and power and "release" of the gospel is stolen by one thief or the other.¹³⁰

An awareness the gospel is for Christians, not only creates a heart of humble dependence, it also reminds us, as we saw in the first chapter, if we are going to produce the flowers (the works) which glorify God, we must be both connected into and dependent upon the root (the gospel).

We Must Believe God Transforms Christians Through the Gospel

In Paul's letter to the Colossians the apostle affirms the gospel is continually producing God-glorifying effects and is continually going forward into the lives of others (1:6). The point is the gospel of the crucified Savior is not only the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), it also is continually the power of transformation and strength (Rom. 16:25).

We have discovered time and time again the gospel teaches us we cannot save or change our self. We are absolutely dependent upon God. To trust in self, something else, or someone else to transform us is idolatry, the very heart of sin (Rom. 1:18-23; 1 Thes. 1:9; Col. 3:5), and that which Christians are to avoid (Col. 3:5; 1 John 5:21)! Yet, one of the most subtle and dangerous sins welcomed in the Church on a regular basis is to substitute some means of Christian-like morality for the gospel:

A litany of devices designed to make us more spiritual or mature or productive or emotionally whole threaten to relegate the gospel to irrelevance, or at least to the realm of the boring and the primitive. The gospel may introduce you to the church, as it were, but from that point on assorted counseling techniques and therapy sessions will change your life and make you happy and fruitful. The gospel may help you make some sort of decision for God, but [you need another device truly to grow].... These [different devices] are not all of a piece. What they have in common, however, is the diminishing of the gospel in order to magnify the current device that is guaranteed to bring you toward wholeness. By contrast, the N[ew] T[estament] passionately insists that everything we need for life and godliness and a walk in the Spirit is secured for us in the gospel.¹³¹

It should come as no surprise to us at this point in our examination of the gospel that to do the right kinds of actions for the wrong reasons and seeking to do them apart from the grace of God, is at the very heart of sin. In fact, it is to overemphasize our own ability, deemphasize the reality of our sinfulness, and elevate our self above God. It is the opposite of the spirit of the person who truly is part of God's kingdom, the person who understands their own poverty and sinfulness (Mt. 5:3-4), as well as their absolute dependence upon God (Mt. 7:7-11). As such, the Christian comes to see that part of that for which we must repent is our self-righteousness:

But Christians are those who have adopted a whole new system of approach to God. They may have

had both religious phases and irreligious phases in their lives. But they have come to see that their entire reason for both their irreligion and their religion was essentially the same and essentially wrong! Christians come to see that both their sins and their best deeds have all really been ways of avoiding Jesus as savior. They come to see that Christianity is not fundamentally an invitation to get more religious. A Christian comes to say: "though I have often failed to obey the moral law, the deeper problem was why I was trying to obey it! Even my efforts to obey it has been just a way of seeking to be my own savior. In that mindset, even if I obey or ask for forgiveness, I am really resisting the gospel and setting myself up as Savior." To "get the gospel" is turn from self-justification and rely on Jesus' record for a relationship with God. The irreligious don't repent at all, and the religious only repent of sins. But Christians also repent of their righteousness.¹³²

The gospel-directed heart of the believer should continually sing, "I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe, I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope."¹³³ With this glorious truth emblazoned upon our soul, we know we cannot trust in self, but must moment-by-moment rest upon the Savior, both for our standing before God and for our transformation.

We Must Believe We Are Dead To The Dominion Of Sin

The reality we are forgiven and accepted in Christ keeps us from being deluged with guilt and despair. Yet, the realization we are new people moves us toward change and growth. The first way we will consider we are new is that our old man, the old person who was enslaved to living under the reign of sin, is dead.

In the midst of calling the Colossians to live out the new life that is in them, Paul writes (Col. 3:9): "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."¹³⁴ This text is not calling the Christian to become a new person or act like they are a new person. It is affirming all who have been regenerated (made alive) have been crucified with Christ and so it is no longer they who live on their own, but Christ who lives in them (Gal. 2:20). "Contrary to what is often taught, the Bible never

represents our old man as still alive—whether kicking and struggling on the cross or hiding somewhere within us. The old man is dead, buried, and gone forever.”¹³⁵

Those who have been saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5) are dead to the dominion of sin. In Romans 6:1-2 Paul asks and answers an important question: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in the sin in order that the grace may abound? **2**By no means! How can we who died to the sin still live in it?” (author’s own translation) Notice that Paul is not asking whether or not we can still sin at all. The answer, then, would be: “yes!” The question has to do with whether or not we can remain in the realm of sin in such a way we are dominated by it. The expected answer is that we cannot go on living subjugated by sin since the old person has been crucified, buried, and raised with Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-10). Specifically, Paul writes in verse 6: “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

Later in that same chapter (Romans 6:17-18), Paul writes: “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, **18**and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” Commenting on Romans 6:4, where Paul writes of our being united to the death and resurrection of Christ “that...we too might walk in newness of life,” Charles Leiter writes: “What is regeneration? It is the new birth of a new man who is a new creation with a new heart and a new nature! But it is more: It is the crucifixion, death, and burial of our old self (the person we once were in Adam) and the raising up of our new self (the person we now are in Christ) to ‘walk in the newness of life.’”¹³⁶ That “newness of life” includes the reality that the regenerated man no longer

must be enslaved to sin such that he is dominated and chiefly characterized by it. This new man is the chief reality of the Christian.

Yet, since the mortal body has not yet been glorified, sin still tries to reign in the body (and this is why the Christian can commit sin), yet Paul clarifies it need not since we are no longer enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:11-14):

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **12**Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **14**For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Simply-put, Paul is saying there is a new reality, a new identity for the Christian. This is why John makes it clear that the Christian cannot continue unabated in or chiefly characterized by sin (cf. 1 John 3:4-9).

The most basic application at this point for the Christian is found in Romans 6:11: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin....” In other words, we must be reminded over and over the old person who had to give into sin or had to refrain from sins in a sinful manner is gone.

Yet, there is also another ramification that arises from the reality of this death to the dominion of sin and that is we will “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). In other words, we will “live in the reality that God has worked in you. You have died. Believe this, and live out the implications of this death.”¹³⁷ To live out the implications of our death and “put to death the deeds of the body” is often referred to as mortification, since the King James Version uses the word “mortify” to translate this verse and also Colossians 3:5, where we find the same idea.

What does Paul mean by “put to death” or “mortify”? It involves taking away the life of sinful desires and sin. If a person is put to death, then all the power of animation, desires, behavior, and bodily functions are removed. If a plant is put to death, all life and nutrition is taken away through a chemical so it no longer grows, but instead withers. The same is to be true of our sinful desires and sin. Tim Keller explains:

Mortification is loosening sin at the motivational level, detecting the roots and shapes of one’s characteristic fleshly motives and withering them through repentance until they lose their attractive power. To “mortify” is to ‘take away the principle of all [its] strength, vigor, and power, so that [it] cannot act or exert, or put forth any proper actings of its own...it refers to the weakening of the root motives, the desires of the sin.’¹³⁸

In both New Testament texts where mortification of sin is explicitly addressed (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5), it is clear from the context that the Christian can put to death sins and the desires that lie behind sins since they have died and been raised to new life in Christ. In other words, the Christian now has the desire and the empowerment from the Spirit of Christ working in him (see Rom. 8:1-11) to refrain from certain activities and places, as well as to change desires and refrain from sins, all-in-all to engage in an “assault on the [flesh],” which will “drain the life out of sin that it never moves again,”¹³⁹ all because in Christ the old person is dead and he is a “new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

It should be obvious by this point that mortification takes place by faith in Christ, faith that in him we are new people and have all we need for a life of godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). “Mortification is the distinctive work of faith. It is faith that purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). Peter says, we ‘purify our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit’ (1 Peter 1:22). Be sure to trust and depend upon Christ if you intend to mortify any sin. Without this, mortification will not take place.”¹⁴⁰ And, it is not only a matter of trusting Christ that we

are a new person, that we can resist sin and live a new life, it is also trusting Christ that there is greater treasure and pleasure in him than in sin (cf. Ps. 16:11; Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Peter 1:6-9).¹⁴¹

Yet, when we live by such faith it produces obedience (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; James 2:14-16). In other words, “we bear fruit for God” (Rom. 7:4), there are actions we take such as draining the life from sexual sin, sinful thoughts, uncontrolled sinful desires, and the idolatrous ruthless desire to have more material things (Col. 3:5). In general, we “do not present [our] members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness” (Rom. 6:12), which is another way of saying we “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14). Because God has made Christ, his gospel, and God’s glory magnificent to us and something that is sweet (Rom. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:6), we fear God and desire to “bring holiness to completion” (2 Cor. 7:1), we want to “abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22) and to flee those sinful passions that tend to run rampant and unchecked among youth (2 Tim. 2:22).

When God saves us, he puts the fear of him in our hearts (Jer. 32:40; 2 Cor. 7:1) and thus gives us the desire to glorify him (Is. 25:3). This means that especially when we come into contact with God’s prohibitions in Scripture, we want to put away from us sin, we desire to cease doing and desiring things contrary to the will of God and thus being conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). The more we say “No” to sin and “Yes” to God, the more we are convinced just how good and acceptable and perfect the will of God is (Rom. 12:2), the more we train ourselves to be godly (1 Tim. 4:7), and the more we “have [our] powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from

evil” (Heb. 5:14). This all happens because we have been made new people, are united to Christ, and, as such, “the old has passed away” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Yet, even though we are new people and have all the resources we need to live a life of godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4), if we “make...provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14), we can have “hearts trained in greed” (2 Pet. 2:14), having become “slaves of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19), “again entangled in” “the defilements of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20).

As we can see, though sin is lived out in the members or different parts of our body, nevertheless, it begins in the heart, in the affections. So, the new man, the saved, regenerated Christian will desire, at some level and in some way, not only to stay away from places and activities that lead him into sin, but he will also desire to stay away from ways of thinking and dwelling on desires that feed such sin. “Sin also carries on its war by entangling the affections [the desires] and drawing them into an alliance against the mind [our reason]. Grace may be enthroned in the mind, but if sin controls the affections, it has seized a fort from which it will continually assault the soul. Hence, we shall see, mortification is chiefly directed to take place on the affections.”¹⁴²

And specifically, what (or whom) must be the object of our growing affections? It is none other than Jesus Christ. After all, eternal life consists in coming to him (Mt. 11:28), looking away from other false objects of salvation that we might look trustingly to him alone (Heb. 12:2), knowing him (John 17:3), loving him (John 14:15), and intimate fellowship with him (Rev. 3:20). Jonathan Dodson, referring to a famous honey illustration by Jonathan Edwards, explains:

I can show you honey. You can marvel at its golden hue, the way it refracts light, and its viscosity. And I can tell you that it is sweet...and you can believe that it is sweet. But unless you have tasted it, you don't know it is sweet. Believing honey is sweet doesn't mean you

really know it is sweet. I could be lying to you. You only know honey is sweet when you have tasted it.

Similarly, faith does not merely believe Christ, but also tastes Jesus.... What does it mean to “taste” Jesus? It’s not getting whipped up into an emotional frenzy. What Edwards was talking about is genuine affection, sincere adoration that changes our behavior. Do you long for Christ? Do you talk to him? Do you spend time with him? Do you trust him with the outcome of your life, job, and family? God-honoring disciples are motivated by holy affection for God.¹⁴³

Now, we can see that though we are justified by grace through faith (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8) and also sanctified by grace through faith (Gal. 2:20; Gal. 5:6; Titus 2:1-14), nevertheless, as we trust in Christ and depend upon the Spirit for growth and change, there is Christ-bought, Spirit-empowered effort we must expend in order to pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14). This is why the same apostle who speaks so much about grace being at the bottom of all we are and do (Titus 2:11-14), can also speak of fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). The same apostle who affirms Christ “has now reconciled [us] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present [us] holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col. 1:22), also says this is true only “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast” (Col. 1:22). We are saved to live a new life, to enable us to continue in the faith. Yet, it all happens as we “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, *not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard*” (Col. 1:23, emphasis added). In other words, a Christian who believes he is dead to sin and thus is killing sin will be a person who takes a certain kind of action and avoids other kinds of action.

The Example Of Joe

Let’s give an example of what mortification of sin looks like.¹⁴⁴ Joe received and rested upon Jesus Christ as his Savior when he had just entered high school. The change in his

behavior and affections was immediate and radical. Whereas up to that point he had no regard for God and almost none for other people, the freshman now had an insatiable appetite for God, his Word, for serving him, and for telling others about Christ.

After going off to the university Joe became involved in two different forces, each of which would shape him for life. The first was a college ministry, in which he eventually became a staff leader. It was during this period that he was convinced God wanted him to become a pastor, so off he went to seminary and then entered his first pastoral ministry, a ministry in which he is still engaged twenty years later.

The other force that entered Joe's world was pornography. Because he married a wonderful young woman, his high school sweetheart, Christine, it seemed to the young man that the pornography had little to do with any inadequacy in her. He loved his wife, found her to be quite beautiful, yet, after weeks and even months away from the pornography, would find himself returning to it.

Joe had been advised in seminary to make sure he always had an accountability partner, so he entered into such a relationship with a pastor in his denomination across town. This pastor not only asked Joe hard questions about purity, he also encouraged the young pastor to keep track of the times he failed. Could he see patterns? Could he discover "triggers" that set him off and turned his heart toward what Joe now referred to as his "coping mechanism" or his "drug-of-choice". This helped immensely, but it still did not seem to be sufficient to sever this noxious weed at the root. He found himself turning in times of stress or depression to this old nemesis, the woman of folly who promised to throw him a lavish party...but it always ended up as a banquet in the grave (Prov. 9:13-18).¹⁴⁵

A turning point for Joe came when he attended a pastor's conference where the main speaker's theme was the impact of the gospel upon the believer. Though he had been taught in seminary and his own Bible study that each Christian is united to Christ and has a new identity, the full reality never hit him until he was sitting in that convention center, surrounded by hundreds of other pastors. For the first time he came to see himself not as "Joe-the-one-who-has-to-give-into-this-habitual-sin". Now, he began to see himself as "Joe-the-one-who-is-in-Christ-and-can-say-'Yes'-to-God-and-'No'-to-sin". With this hope, Joe began to change.

Ah, but the battle was not yet over. It had only just begun in earnest. First, the next time Joe met with his fellow pastor for accountability, he asked if they could move beyond mere accountability questions to something more, namely, helping each other apply the gospel and trust in Christ that they might love him more and obey him more fully. The basis of Joe's desire was found in a passage of Scripture he heard taught at the conference, Hebrews 3:12-14, which reads: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13**But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **14**For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Here, Joe understood that one of the key ways Christians help each other and "stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24) is by reminding and supporting one another in the application of the gospel so that we are not hardened by sin's lies.

Next, Joe began to read and memorize the Bible differently. He was discovering that Christ and the gospel were the glue that held it all together, as well as the engine driving

holiness. He ceased studying and preaching in such a way that focused on principles or commands alone. With new and fresh eyes, he began to see that the storyline, as well as the thrust of each text, was how in Christ we are empowered to set ourselves apart to the glory of God in all the details.

Additionally, Joe found himself praying differently. He was not coming to God now so much as a Christian practicing a spiritual discipline, but as a child in desperate need of his Father's help in everything (Mt. 7:7-11). He had come to see: "The gospel, God's free gift of grace in Jesus, only works when we realize we don't have it all together. The same is true for prayer. The very thing we are allergic to—our helplessness—is what makes prayer work. It works because we are helpless. We can't do life on our own. Prayer mirrors the gospel."¹⁴⁶ In the midst of this work God was doing in Joe, he came to see that God was using this addiction to drive him to greater dependence. "How could a pastor who has studied the Bible so much, loved God and his wife so deeply, and sought to give God his life wholeheartedly, struggle with such a heinous, ongoing, persistent, soul-wrecking sin?" The answer, he was beginning to see, had to do with the absolute helplessness of man apart from the Christ-bought, Spirit-empowered strength of the gospel!¹⁴⁷ And in that helplessness he must look to his Savior for the grace to see that Christ offers far greater treasure and pleasure than the temptation that destructively and deceptively beckoned him to her (Prov. 5:1-23; Mt. 6:19-21; Heb. 11:24-26). He began to view sexual sin as an attempt to satisfy his hunger by eating out of the garbage bin behind a mansion when the master of the mansion has set a true and healthy feast for him inside!

Here is where this Christian man's story gets interesting. Some years now after God brought Joe to a discovery of the resources he has in Christ, his new identity, his absolute helplessness by himself, and just how much he must daily live out of the reality he is more sinful than he would ever imagine and yet more loved by God than he will ever fully know, Joe had noticed that the pull of pornography, though weakened by the gospel-directed disciplining of himself unto godliness, nonetheless could be strengthened again by giving into it. This led him to loathe this sin and all sin, which not only nailed his Savior to the cross, but which also could so quickly come back into the territory of his soul as an insurgent and wreak such havoc. He could readily identify with these words he came across in his devotional reading one day:

Sin to a believer is horrible, because it crucified the Saviour; he sees in every iniquity the nails and spear. How can a saved soul behold that cursed kill-Christ sin without abhorrence? Say, my heart, dost thou sensibly join in all this? It is an awful thing to insult God to his face. The good God deserves better treatment, the great God claims it, the just God will have it, or repay His adversary to his face. An awakened heart trembles at the audacity of sin, and stands alarmed at the contemplation of its punishment. How monstrous a thing is rebellion! How direful a doom is prepared for the ungodly! My soul never laugh at sin's fooleries, lest thou come to smile at sin itself. It is thine enemy, and thy Lord's enemy—view it with detestation, for so only canst thou evidence the possession of holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.¹⁴⁸

Armed with confidence in the sufficiency of Christ, the reality of his identity in Christ, comfort in the resources of the gospel and the certainty of God's promises, as well as a hatred of sin, Joe began to take very serious action to sever the root of sin, knowing that he must "be killing sin or it will be killing you."¹⁴⁹ With faith in Christ, dependence upon the Spirit, support from fellow believers, saturation in the Word, and continual child-like prayer he took steps to have his internet habits monitored, to avoid watching television programs and movies that would feed this sin, and he remembered that the beauty, relief, and joy "dame folly" was falsely promising him led only to the grave

(Prov. 9:13-18). What's more, he discovered such beauty, relief, and joy could be found ultimately only in Christ (Mt. 6:19-21). So, he must not only mortify sins, he must also grow in his love for and worship of Christ.

This discovery by Joe leads us to the fourth consequence of the gospel we must trust in and to which we must respond.

We Must Consider Ourselves Alive To God In Christ

Not only must we believe we are dead to sin and mortify sin; we must also consider ourselves alive to God in Christ and thus pursue holiness.

The key text for our third consequence of the gospel was Romans 6:11 and so it is for this one. Again, the full verse reads: "So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Since we are united to Christ, we have not only been crucified and buried with him, we also have been raised with him that "we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). As such, Paul exhorts us in Rom. 6:11 to live out that new life. Like with mortification, so with this positive aspect of sanctification (sometimes called vivification),¹⁵⁰ placing trust in Christ for what has happened leads to action. Consider some examples: "Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13); "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:1-2); "but put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14); and "so flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

Part of vivification is seeing, as did Moses (Heb. 11:24-26) that though the sin by which we used to be dominated offers a temporary (and destructive) pleasure, nevertheless, the joy that comes from Jesus Christ is much greater, better, and more lasting (Psalm 23:2-3, 5-6; Mt. 6:19-21; John 16:24; 2 Cor. 1:24)

It must also be understood that at no point in a person's growth as a Christian does he leave behind the gospel, including this area of vivification. All along the way, progress and growth are the outgrowth of the gospel. Tim Keller once again explains:

The gospel is, therefore, radically different from religion. Religion operates on the principle: "I obey, therefore I am accepted". The gospel operates on the principle: "I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey." So the gospel differs from both religion and irreligion. Not only can you seek to be your own 'lord and savior' by breaking the law of God (i.e., through irreligion), you can also do so by keeping the law in order to earn your salvation (i.e., through religion). A lack of deep belief in the gospel is the main cause of spiritual deadness, fear, and pride in Christians, because our hearts continue to act on the basis "I obey, therefore, I am accepted." If we fail to forgive others--that is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to believe we are saved by grace, too. If we lie in order to cover up a mistake--that is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to find our acceptance in God rather than in human approval. So we do not 'get saved' by believing the gospel and then 'grow' by trying hard to live according to Biblical principles. Believing the gospel is not only the way to meet God, but also the way to grow into him.¹⁵¹

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One of the realities Joe found out in his struggle against pornography is that the more he rested in Christ for his strength (Eph. 6:10) and, as a result, lived out his new life—disciplining himself unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7); having his “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14)—this gospel-fueled, salvation-effected, faith-strengthened, righteous way protected him from the onslaughts of Satan (Eph. 6:14-18) and kept the evil one from getting an opportunity in his life (Eph. 4:27). It really is true that when he humbly trusts in God and resists Satan, the evil one truly does flee from him! (James 4:7-8; 1 Peter 5:6-10)

As is often true with those who are being awakened to the centrality of the gospel, Joe went through a time when he forgot he must actively consider himself dead to sin and alive to God and, as such, must make no provision for the flesh, but instead must pursue holiness (Rom. 13:14; Heb. 12:14). As he underwent an even greater awakening to the centrality of the gospel to strengthen him, he realized he had slipped into a way of thinking that he could simply be passive since he was in Christ. Yet, God, in his grace, helped the struggling man come to remember that by faith in Christ for both his standing and strength, he could and should actively flee lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. He must never forget that growth in the Christian life is a “fight” that involves keeping “the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Joe’s further awakening that he must actively pursue both mortification and vivification did not cause him to turn merely to discipline or self-effort. Instead, it propelled him to look even more “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), not only looking to him for resources and a model, but also to pursue with even greater intensity the means of grace Jesus has purchased and given—namely, the Word (Ac. 20:32; Phil. 2:16; Col. 3:16; 1 Thes. 2:13), prayer (Ps. 141:3-4; Mt. 7:7-11 [in light of Lk. 11:13]; Jn. 14:12-14; Heb. 4:16); and assembling together with other believers (Heb. 10:24-25).

We Must Progress In Holiness By Faith In Christ

This fifth and final consequence of the gospel for the growth and change of believers is a truth we have been leaning toward in the previous two consequences, but it must be stated out right and remembered always. The author of Hebrews puts it this way: “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Christians are to pursue hotly, with the same intensity as a zealous

persecutor (Acts 9:4-5), both peace and holiness.¹⁵² The holiness Christians are to strive after is none other than the same kind of holiness God has (Heb. 12:10b), which Scripture shows is God's commitment to, his being set apart to, his own glory (Ps. 102:15; Is. 6:3).¹⁵³ Holiness, then, is "the measure of Love's devotion to God, or, more specifically, the purity of love's devotion to God."¹⁵⁴ Such devotion to God and his glory works its way out, in part, by putting him on display in love for others. This is why in the mind of Paul to be holy is to grow in love for others (1 Thes. 3:12-13). The hot pursuit of holiness, then, is none other than the gospel-propelled quest for and outworking of a genuine walk with Christ, a walk that James describes in this twofold way: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

How does the Christian strive for holiness? In Heb. 12:1-2 we learn: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Notice the manner in which we "lay aside every weight, and sin...and...run with endurance the race" is literally "by continually looking to Jesus" (author's translation). The term translated "continually looking" is used only here in the New Testament and suggests continually looking away from something and fixing one's eyes trustingly in a different direction.¹⁵⁵ The immediate and larger contexts suggests that Jesus, in his death, serves as a model for how we endure and run the race, namely,

we trust in Jesus “for the joy set before [us]” and he also is the cause of our salvation and endurance (e.g. 6:13-20; 9:11-22).

Notice, then, that what Hebrews is setting forth as the manner of pursuing holiness is none other than the gospel—we seek to glorify God by loving him and others, by putting him on display through lives that please him; yet we know we cannot do this left to self or by following Law, rather we must trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, which results in forgiveness by God and our becoming new people who are able to “run with endurance the race set before us” only as we are continually looking away from false objects of faith and looking by faith to Jesus. Hebrews, then, is all about keeping that gospel in front of us that we might live out its entailments. Another way to say this is daily, continually, we must engage in this discipline: “Preach the gospel to yourself.”¹⁵⁶

What does preaching the gospel to self involve? As Heb. 12:2 implies, it involves looking away from false objects of faith and looking to the only true and sufficient object of faith, the only Savior, Jesus Christ. In other words, “the two critical events are repentance and faith.”¹⁵⁷ Steven L. Childers agrees: “Repentance and faith have been called the two dynamics of a ‘spiritual combustion cycle’ that God means to be at work in our hearts at all times, changing us into the image of his Son. In order for us to experience the transforming power of the gospel in our lives, we must continually be repenting and believing in the gospel.”¹⁵⁸

When a Christian understands that such daily and continual preaching of the gospel is the manner in which he can look away from idols, from the “every weight and sin which clings so closely” and look by faith to Jesus and “run with endurance the race that is set

before us,” he knows how to pursue holiness. He also understands it is not something that is done passively. Instead, it is a fight of faith.

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And so, because he had internalized these five outcomes of the gospel in his life, was trusting in Christ to fulfill these in him, and was therefore seeking to apply them, Joe “lived happily ever after,” right? Well, yes and no. If what we mean by this is that Joe finally arrived and never struggled with sin or temptation again, the answer is “No, he did not live happily ever after!” In fact, one of the lessons God taught this saint is that though he is to view himself as one redeemed in Christ, rather than merely a “recovering sex addict,” he must remember that he must continually look to Jesus the author and perfecter of his faith that he might continually pursue holiness (Heb. 12:2, 14). He must continually abide in Christ to bear fruit (John 15:5). He can and should expect grace, growth, and success in Christ. Yet, he must always remain watchful and sober against the enemy (1 Peter 5:8).

Yet, when we say that Joe “lived happily ever after,” if we mean that this pastor found greater and intensified joy in seeing his Savior grow him (Compare Jn. 14:13 with Jn.16:24. See also Jn. 15:11), the answer is, “Absolutely, yes, this is true!” As the years passed, Joe was moved to tears of joy and gratitude toward Christ, realizing that his life and marriage would be a disaster, if it had not been for the grace of his Savior. What is more, he knew that the sufferings of the present life (including his battle with sin) were not even worthy to be compared to the glory that someday would be revealed in him (Rom. 8:18)! “Happily ever after?” O, yes! God has shown to Joe the path of life and that what awaits him is fullness of joy and pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11).

There is, however, another way in which Joe's growth in grace impacted him, and that is how he approached his ministry as a pastor. With that reality in mind, we will highlight in our four remaining chapters how an understanding of gospel-directed evangelism and growth should shape all aspects of the Church.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORD MINISTRY IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

By its very nature the good news must be heralded (Mt. 4:17, 23; Mk. 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:17, 23; 9:16). This is not only established by example in the New Testament, but also flows from the reality it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) and the message by which Christians are strengthened (Rom. 16:25). What is more, since the Word of God must be at the heart of all Christian ministry (Jn. 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:2) and the gospel is at the core of the Word (Eph. 1:13), it stands to reason that the gospel should be at the heart of all the teaching of the Church.

Yet, if that Word ministry is to be in step with the gospel, how should it be done? Based upon the foundation that has been laid so far, there are a number of ramifications for how the Church goes about teaching the Scriptures. First, we will look at how all Word ministry is to be shaped. Then, we will say a few words specifically about three different kinds of Word ministry: Preaching, one-on-one or small group discipleship, and parenting.

All Word Ministry

As we discuss Word ministry in general, think carefully about how you should apply what is said to the various ways God has called you to be a gospel teacher, whether it is pastoral ministry, parenting, teaching Sunday School, leading a small group, discipling one-on-one, helping a fellow-believer through hard times (soul cure), or some other setting.

It Must Have The Glory Of God As Its Ultimate Purpose

One of the chief lessons we have discovered in our journey through the Bible and its teaching on the gospel is that God's ultimate purpose is to glorify himself (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 26; 36:22-32; Rom. 11:36) and he calls us to that same purpose (Mt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:9-11; 2:15). Such an aim shapes how we approach all teaching and preaching of the Word. It entails we desire to be faithful to what the Word says and not to change its message (Gal. 1:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:15). Additionally, we seek to let the Lord receive the glory for the work he is doing, rather than trying to put on display our creativity or ability (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5).

The chief end of God's glory should also shape the goals we set for those to whom we are communicating. We are never content merely to dump information or data upon people. Instead, we desire and pray for them to respond to God's Word in ways that will honor him. Jesus made it very clear this will mean we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Mt. 22:37 [cf. Dt. 6:5]). As we saw in Titus 2:12, Paul clarified that the truly saved person lives a godly life, which involves devotion to God. Such love and devotion for God will lead to trust in him (Compare Rom. 1:5), a trust that glorifies God (Rom. 4:20). Such love-driven faith in God will also work its way out in humble obedience to him (John 14:15; Rom. 1:5). When God's Spirit is working in the regenerated heart, there will also be godly grief and repentance when a person does not follow God (2 Cor. 7:9-10; 1 John 1:9).

So, we teach the Scriptures in such a way that we strive for and pray for these kinds of ends. Yet, we understand that the passion, ability, or any other characteristic the Word communicator brings to the table will not be the deciding factor when it comes to change and growth in others. Instead, it is the sovereign grace of God working through his Spirit

(1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24; 2:5, 7, 10, 12-16). As such, we rest in God, we remain courageous to proclaim his Word accurately and faithfully, and we leave the results to him.¹⁵⁹ What is more, we give him the praise when lives are transformed!

It Must Be Christ-Centered

This truth follows from what we have already said—namely, that Christ is the center of Scripture (Mt. 2:15; 5:17-19; Luke 24:27; Acts 10:43; Col. 2:16-17) and Christians are strengthened by the gospel (Rom. 16:25). What is more, the Father is chiefly glorified through the glorification of the Son (John 5:23; 17:1) and no one can become a God-glorifying, God-loving follower of the Savior apart from the proclamation of the glorious work of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:7) or apart from the work of Christ applied to him (1 Cor. 1:18, 24).

First of all, this necessitates that we always bring people back to Jesus. For example, if we are preaching a sermon or leading a family devotional about giving, we must clarify that both our model for giving and the grace for giving in a way that honors God (2 Cor. 9:6-7) comes from Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:8-15). Apart from being called to focus upon what Christ has done for us and continues to do, we will not have the exceeding joy that leads us to beg that we might give of self, time, and resources to benefit others and display the glory of God (2 Cor. 8:1-5). This does not mean that we cannot or should not use commands such as Proverbs 3:9 (“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce....”). Rather, as we do this, we must help each other see the ongoing necessary part Jesus Christ plays as we “live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:2) and abide in him to bear lasting fruit (John 15:1-17).

Very closely related is the need to help each other grow in our intimate knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ. After all, eternal life consists in knowledge of him (John 17:3) that works its way out in rest and joy (Mt. 11:28-30; John 15:11; 16:24; 2 Cor. 8:2; Gal. 5:22). This is why Paul explained to the Corinthians and Philippians he labored for their joy (2 Cor. 1:24; Phil. 1:25). Ladies, if you are meeting with a younger woman to train and equip her (Titus 2:3-4) and the subject turns to modesty in dress, wisdom will take you beyond mere principles and commands. Though you will want to teach what Scripture says about modesty in 1 Timothy 2:9 (“...women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty....”), the ultimate goal should be to strive to address the heart, namely by going back to “the glorious gospel of the happy God” (1 Tim. 1:11, author’s translation), that is, the meditating, redeeming work of Christ (1 Tim. 2:5) that can lead to godliness with contentment (1 Tim 6:6). Such a focus calls a young woman to consider how she approaches dress in a way that honors her Savior who loves her so deeply, which is consistent with why she was created and redeemed (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Additionally, it calls a young woman to consider the welfare of her fellow brothers in Christ whom she will cause to stumble with inappropriate attire (1 Cor. 10:26-31; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Thes. 4:3-8). She should see that modesty is not a burden to carry because she cannot dress like the rest of the world does (cf. 1 John 2:15-17), it is a joy in that it is part of her love for Jesus Christ, her exaltation of him, and her blood-bought love for fellow-believers in the Church!¹⁶⁰

It Must Be Idol-Smashing

Since God created us to worship and honor him and this can only happen as we come to love, delight in, and trust Jesus Christ, we must also be reminded of a truth we have seen

multiple times so far, namely that at the heart of all sin is the opposite of this—idolatry.

Tim Keller explains:

One of the most life-changing and especially ministry-changing things in my life was reading Martin Luther's "Larger Catechism"...[where] he lays out his understanding of the Ten Commandments. Luther says that the first commandment is first because...all the other commandments are based on it. In other words, when you break any of the commandments two through ten, you have already broken or are in the process of breaking commandment one. So, Martin Luther says you don't lie unless you have already made something else more than God your functional savior; something else is your greatest joy. Why do you lie? You lie either because the approval of other people is more important than God's or because money is more than the security you have in God. So you wouldn't lie unless you already have first made something else more important than God in your life . . . something more fundamental to your meaning in life or happiness or joy. And then Luther went one step further and said underneath every sin is idolatry in general. And underneath every idolatry in general is always some form of work-righteousness in general, in particular some kind of self-salvation project . . . whenever you make something more important than God, that thing is essentially a savior of your making.¹⁶¹

When we are teaching or preaching a passage or taking up a subject, we must always keep this thought close at hand, namely that our tendency as sinful human beings is to worship something or someone other than God, to look to something or someone as our savior other than Jesus Christ. This reality should always color our discussion of sin.

What is more, when we are helping someone work through difficulties, whether it is depression,¹⁶² fear of other people,¹⁶³ addiction,¹⁶⁴ or viewing our self as a victim because of the pain others have caused us,¹⁶⁵ we must with great love (Jn. 13:34-35), sensitivity and humility (Mt. 7:1-5; Gal. 6:1-2), patience (1 Thes. 5:14), and gentleness (2 Tim. 2:25) help each other see that we struggle against idols and must turn the affections of our heart and our faith from them to Christ (Ezek. 36:25; 1 Thes. 1:2-10; 1 John 5:21).

What this means, for example, is that if you are discipling a young woman who has an eating disorder, one of the realities you must help her come to see is that she has made the approval of her body by others a functional god she worships and this god has become her master, enslaving her in its deadly grasp. By God's grace working in her life,

through his wisely-applied Word, in response to the prayer support of many around her, and as she is brought into the community of other caring Christians, she must come to see that Jesus Christ should become the object of her trust and affection, for knowledge of the only true God will be the only object of worship that will not enslave, but instead will truly feed and satisfy. “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:35)¹⁶⁶

It Must Address The Mind And Affections

If Word ministry is aimed at bringing each other to the point of glorifying God, trusting in and delighting in Jesus Christ, and also dealing with idols, it stands to reason that the affections must be shaped.¹⁶⁷ Scripture teaches the shaping of the affections is ultimately a divine work (Is. 25:3; 29:19; Jer. 17:9; 32:40; Ezek. 36:26-27; Phil. 2:13) that is carried out by God’s Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; Titus 3:5) working upon our minds (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Tim. 2:7) through the Word of God (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:1-7, 15; 3:16-17).

What this means, for example, is that if we are working with a husband and wife who are drifting apart in their marriage, our goal is not merely to help them work through or find common ground on their differences. We must help them see more of the beauty of Christ so that each of their hearts is set upon him with greater affection, resulting in their increased faith in him, renewed passion to worship and follow him, and a resolve to trust in him to change them that they might love each other more. They must love each other more by loving each other less than Christ (i.e. by loving Christ far more).¹⁶⁸ Likewise, a sermon or Sunday School lesson addressing marriage will never merely set forth principles for successful relationships. Instead, hearts should be lifted up to delight in

Christ with the goal that he will shape the desire to change, to grow in one's love for their spouse, and to engage in reconciliation, as needed.

Those ministering the Word must help each of us follow the admonition of the 19th century British pastor, Charles Spurgeon:

The more you know about Christ the less will you be satisfied with superficial views of Him; and the more deeply you study His transactions in the eternal covenant, His engagements on your behalf as the eternal Surety, and the fullness of His grace which shines in all His offices, the more truly will you see the King in His beauty. Be much in such outlooks. Long more and more to see Jesus.¹⁶⁹

It Must Explain the Gospel

Though this point needs little elaboration since it has been the thrust of this book, nevertheless, it must never be assumed and so must be stated. Preaching, teaching, discipleship, soul cure, and parental approaches which do not contain the gospel and which are not incessantly bringing each other back to what the gospel is and how God saves, grows, and changes us through it, are not worthy of the label "Christian".

We have seen that whether the New Testament authors were putting together basic manuals to help orient Christians to Christ and his message (the four Gospels); were addressing divisions within a church, as well as motivating them to get on board with missions work (Romans); or were helping a Church address their licentious behavior that was shaped by an infectious culture (Titus); or were moving Christians away from the cult of personality (1 Cor. 1-4), the approach was to bring them back to the gospel. Our Word ministry should do no less than this.

It Must Teach How A Christian Changes And Grows

The reality that God changes people by his Spirit working through his Word (the core of which is the gospel), almost always in response to prayer, and usually in the midst of

the community of his people, must never be far from our thinking or from our ministry approach. At its heart should be the five truths of Chapter Five that were outlined, those truths that must be believed and lived out for change and growth to occur.

It Must Be Bathed In Prayer

This final point is absolutely indispensable for all Word ministry to be shaped by the gospel. Those who are part of the kingdom are those who recognize their poverty in spirit (Mt. 5:3) and therefore grasp they are dependent upon the Father who provides their needs and gives them good gifts through his Spirit (Mt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:13). So, they come to him “as children to a father, able and ready to help”¹⁷⁰ them. Those who walk in step with the gospel understand they are needy and such “dependency is the heartbeat of prayer.”¹⁷¹

To begin, we must bathe our preparation for Word ministry in prayer. Wisdom would lead us to follow the example of the Puritans who “obviously studied their Bibles daily, falling to their knees as God’s Spirit burned the Word into their pastoral hearts.”¹⁷² We ask the Lord not only to help us understand the Scriptures and see them with the right heart (Ps. 119:33-36), we also look to him for wisdom, guidance, and power as we put together sermons, lessons, family devotions, discipleship lessons, and guidance for soul cure. Our constant plea is that we might make his Word clear (Col. 4:4) and that it might be received in such a way that people are saved and stand strong in Christ against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10, 18).

Next, we also pray for fruit, for changed hearts and lives through our Word ministry. As we explain the Scriptures we should be always aware that God must make the deaf to hear, enable eyes of the blind to see, and work in his people to have the willingness to

apply his Word (Is. 29:18; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 2:10-16; Phil. 2:13). As such, our continual bent must be to lean toward and upon Jesus Christ moment-by-moment, that we might bear lasting fruit (John 15:1-16).

Also, we will even pray for the opportunity to share the gospel with the unsaved, for we know only God can orchestrate those situations—especially in a way people are open to hear (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3-4).

Anticipating somewhat our discussion of the next chapter, it is important at this point to note that the Church directed by the gospel takes intentional steps to bring people together in prayer, for they understand unless he works in and through the congregation and its families, their labor will be ineffective (Ps. 127:1). This begins in staff meetings and among the elders. It continues on through the congregation so that people come together in small groups and/or in larger prayer assemblies for prayer, and it also includes encouraging families to pray together. We believe we need God only to the degree we pray. Therefore, those who grasp the gospel and the life shaped by the gospel come to and call regularly upon the Lord, knowing he will hear them and act for them (Is. 64:4; Jer. 29:12-14a).

Having set forth several directives for all Word ministry, we now turn to some more specific guidance for three particular kinds.

Preaching

It Must Be Thoroughly Biblical

This is not only true because the Bible affirms that Scripture is to be the focus of the true preacher and gospel minister (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:2), it is also true because it is

modeled by the biblical writers (e.g. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16) and it is the Bible that defines what the gospel is and shows how it must inform belief and behavior. For a high percentage of preachers throughout history this has meant preaching through books of the Bible as the main diet of the Church,¹⁷³ but certainly does not exclude some carefully preached topical sermons and series that are shaped by the text.

Such preaching will only come to fruition by men who immerse themselves in the systematic study of the biblical text, read the entire Bible regularly, and memorize the Scriptures. It has been my impression throughout the years that the best way to approach these disciplines is simply to remain consistent and faithful, even if you feel like you are not biting off large chunks of material. A little each day and week over the course of months and years will yield a rich harvest over the course of time.¹⁷⁴

It Must Be Shaped By Gospel-Directed Questions

One of the practices that has helped me shape preaching by the gospel as much as anything is to have a set of questions I run through as I write a sermon that directs my thinking. For example: Does the sermon seek to put God on display more than anything else? How is it centered around Christ? In what way(s) is Christ necessary for the application of the topic-at-hand? How do I need to explain the gospel? In what way must I talk about idols and the need to remove them? Have I taken into consideration both the mind and affections? How should I speak about the manner in which a Christian grows and changes? In what way is the message moving people to trust in Christ? Am I bathing the preparation and the preaching of the sermon in prayer? I print out a grid with these kinds of questions on it that guides my preparation and prayer as I write and then prepare to preach a sermon. See Appendix 3 for that grid.

It Must Be Informed By Christ-Centered Materials

When I began to be awakened to the centrality of Christ and the gospel to the Bible and then realized my preaching must reflect this glorious theme, I realized I had not seen this practiced a lot. What helped me were resources that teased out practical implications. For example, when it comes to God-honoring, Christ-centered preaching, two very helpful books are *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming The Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005, revised), by Bryan Chapell, and *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, revised), by John Piper. When it comes to learning how to think through the overall Bible and how it fits together around Christ, a helpful tool is *Biblical Theology In The Life Of The Church: A Guide For Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), by Michael Lawrence.

There are also wonderful on-line resources. Sermons and workshop messages delivered at *The Gospel Coalition* conferences are of immeasurable help. They are available at the gospelcoalition.org. Similarly messages delivered at the *Together 4 The Gospel* conferences are invaluable: t4g.org. Additionally, blogs and other materials available on *The Gospel Coalition* site will introduce the preacher to other tools, as well as continually feed the soul and challenge the preacher's mind regarding how the gospel should direct preaching.

Finally, there is also great benefit in networking with other pastors regarding how the gospel should inform and shape all of our preaching. Pastors in our area have done this by forming *The Nebraska Gospel Network* (thenebraskagospelnetwork.org), but it can also be done most places simply by finding another pastor (or more) who understands the

biblical gospel and its importance and regularly meeting for discussions and mutual encouragement.

Discipleship

If there is an area in which evangelical Word ministry has lacked gospel direction, it has been that of discipleship.¹⁷⁵ The way I am using that word here is to refer to the process of working with other persons in a small group or on one-one-one basis to help them trust Christ as their Savior and then grow in their obedience to him and likeness of him, with the result that they can turn around and do the same kind of work with others (Mt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:2). The primary focus in this section will be on helping Christians grow and also helping them with cure of the soul.¹⁷⁶

Between utilizing counseling approaches that are shaped primarily by extra-biblical presuppositions, goals, and models of help, and approaching growth as a process of merely following principles or exercising discipline, the Church is in desperate need of coming back to the gospel! In addition to the directions above that were applied to all Word ministry, here are some more specific ways discipleship can be directed by the good news.

It Must Not Divide Too Deeply Between Evangelism And Discipleship

Especially because so many Christians have been raised in an environment in which they have heard about a cheap grace, that is, that God saves when a person makes a decision for Christ, but does not transform, they have not understand what true saving faith is, nor what the Christian life is truly like. As such, they have learned some of the language of piety, but they have never with repentance received and rested upon Christ

alone for salvation. As such, what they desperately need is to repent and trust Christ, even though they made a profession of faith years earlier. Though it has been assumed they are saints (2 Cor. 1:1), they must examine themselves to see if they are truly in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). What such self-deceived persons need is the same thing the Christian needs for strength and growth—the gospel explained (Rom. 1:16; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:13; Col. 1:5-6).

It Must Include Gospel-Shaped Teaching And Accountability

As we work with fellow Christians in growth and soul care settings, it is very appropriate and necessary to teach them to “train yourself for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7) which would include being self-controlled and seeking to be a model of good works so that they “may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior” (Titus 2:2, 6, 7, 10). Yet, it is imperative to understand that such behavior must be “in accordance with the glorious gospel” (1 Tim. 1:11), which, in part, means there is an understanding that such godliness comes only through the grace of God in Christ (Titus 2:11-14), as one is “strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). Specifically, disciples of Jesus Christ must be taught that God’s grace in Jesus is at the core of their ongoing strength and growth and how they grow and change based upon that same gospel.

There is also a necessity that Christians live in close enough relationship with each other they can “admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak” (1 Thes. 5:14); in other words, they can “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). This is grounded in the reality we “share in Christ” (Heb. 3:14). God not only saves the individual, he saves him to be part of his corporate redemptive project: “living

stones...being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5). We have been created as those who benefit from others (Gen. 2:18) and by God’s redemptive work in us we should progressively see that need for each other with greater clarity. The Christian is greatly benefited by being in a small group of believers who can help each other know what it means to grow in Christ and to pray for one another to that end (Eph. 6:18; James 5:16).

Additionally, to be in an even closer, more intimate friendship with one or two other Christians so you can sharpen each other (Prov. 27:17) is invaluable. Yet, these relationships must not be mere accountability groups, asking questions about behavior that may shame you into seeking to conform by your own strength to a set of ethical standards. They must have an even deeper goal that moves beyond the thinking, “they will ask me tough questions next week, so I better say ‘No’ to this temptation right now,” to helping each other turn to Jesus Christ that they might live by faith in him (Gal. 2:20) and that they might not just fight the fight, but fight the fight that involves keeping the faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7).¹⁷⁷

Herein we come to the core of why soul cure (or counseling) is best done within the context of the Church. This does not mean there is no place for a person to meet one-on-one with a person whose experience and giftedness makes them especially capable and case-wise in dealing with problems of the soul. It does mean that such counseling is best done by one who is a Christian and understands the necessity of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the strengthening and growth of a person. It also means that soul cure is most effective when the person can have an ongoing relationship with the counselor and can be supported by a small group of Christians who help them bear their burdens (Gal. 6:2).

With struggles most Christians face, sufficient help can be found in such a gospel-directed small group of fellow believers. And, even in those times when a person must go to a more seasoned counselor, the gospel-directed small group support is invaluable.

It Must Be Confident In Christ

God promised he would do a great and mighty work in the hearts of all his people (Jer. 31:34): He would take strong, fear-inspiring, destructive people and work in the depth of their being in such a way they would hear, see, and understand his truth whereas they did not previously (Is. 29:18-20, 24), they would fear and glorify him (Is. 25:3; 29:23; Jer. 32:40), and this because God would forgive and cleanse them from their idolatry, as well as transform them from the inside out through his Spirit so that they would carry out his will (Ezek. 36:25-27; Hosea 2:14-23).

Since we find out this is the very work God has accomplished in his people through his Son-bought, Spirit transformation of all his people through his Word, the core of which is the gospel, working usually in response to prayer, and among his Church (John 3:1-8; 14:12-14; 16:7-11; Romans 1:16; 6:1-23; 8:1-11; 10:13-17; 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16; Col. 1:5-6; Heb. 10:24-25), we must grasp the important reality that “his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3). The means for change and growth Christ has purchased for us, with the result that a redeemed, regenerated people can help each other, cannot be exactly matched anywhere else. So, our discipling ministry, especially when it comes to the cure of souls (a work the Church has all too often “farmed out” the past couple of generations), should take place with great confidence in Christ that he will do a very fruitful work through those who are abiding in

him (John 15:1-16) and who are diligently working to handle the Word of truth accurately, as well as to be equipped and competent in that Word for every good work (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17).¹⁷⁸

Not only must the Church strive by the grace of Christ to equip saints to help each other, this should be done with both confidence and boldness in Christ. Confidence in Christ will lead the Church to believe we are adequate in Christ to help each other in the vast majority of soul cure situations faced. Boldness in Christ will lead saints to step out by faith to challenge each other in hard situations to believe Christ for strength to do what is right. Let me provide an example.

Suppose two cousins who years ago purchased a grocery store together are in the same congregation. Unknown to others they had a dispute that has led them not to talk to each other outside of the store. The only interaction they have with each other is what is absolutely necessary during business hours. Otherwise, they have remained estranged. One day this situation becomes known through a third party who overhears a small group leader mention he will invite both parties to be part of his small group. This third party informs the leader that the two cousins are at odds and probably should not be part of the same group since it could be destructive to the group. The way most people, including those in many congregations, would handle this is to ignore it and think it none of their business and the best thing to do is stay out of it. Yet, when we grasp the power and ramifications of the gospel, we not only see that God commands these two parties to reconcile (Mt. 5:23-25; 1 Cor. 6:1-11; Eph. 4:29-32), he also supplies what he commands. As a result, the third party who discovered the dispute and the small group

leader, if needed, can approach the two cousins and help them work through their differences, mend their hearts, and be reconciled.¹⁷⁹

Parenting

In each of these two specific areas of Word ministry we have addressed so far (preaching and discipleship), there is much more that could be said about how they can be gospel-directed. However, I have addressed what I believe are some key areas for each. I will do the same now when it comes to this area of Word ministry.¹⁸⁰

It Must Not Be Neglected

It has become common for many parents to think that somehow they are not adequate to teach their children the gospel that they might trust Christ and be strengthened in him. This is especially true for how parents view their children during their teen years. Yet, Scripture is clear that parents should be the primary teachers of the Word in the lives of their sons and daughters (Dt. 6:4-7; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4), with the Church playing a supportive and supplementary role. As we alluded to briefly in our discussion on evangelism in Chapter 6, this abdication of responsibility on the part of parents arises from faulty thinking. When we realize that God works in the heart of a person by his Spirit, whose presence has been purchased by Christ, through his Word (the core of which is the gospel), and typically in response to prayer, this helps free up the parent to teach and disciple their sons and daughters with confidence in Christ.

It Must Not Rely Upon Formulas

A gospel-shaped truth set forth in the Old Testament, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1), and expanded upon in the New

Testament, is wisely remembered by parents. Just as abandonment of parenting responsibilities has become common among many parents, so there are many who do take up the mantle in a very serious manner, yet, they approach it by thinking if they do all the right things, their children will turn out fine. Though parents may define success with variation, it often includes children being good, moral persons, those who follow Christ. It is assumed that if parents follow the biblical pattern for parenting, all will turn out well.

This view of parenting has enough truth in it to be very dangerous, as do most forms of idolatry. Parents who are in step with the gospel will certainly want to heed the details of Scripture when it comes to discipling and raising sons and daughters. Yet, it should all be seen as an outgrowth of continually looking to Christ and trusting in him. Parents cannot change or shape their children's hearts by their own power or influence in Gospel-shaped, God-honoring ways anymore than they can anyone else's. They must utilize the weapons God has given and their faith must always be in Christ!

It Must Call Children Regularly To Trust Christ

Like with all Word ministry, parenting should strive to see the heart changed, not for mere outward conformity (cf. Prov. 3:5; Mt. 15:10-20; 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16).¹⁸¹ One of the implications this has is that parents will not inordinately protect or keep their children from difficult situations.¹⁸² For example, if a family member dies, the wise gospel-directed parent does not conclude, "Wow, it might be upsetting for Mary to go to the funeral, since she is only eight, so she can stay home." Instead, they realize experiencing death is part of life and must be faced as they are taught how to look to Christ and his resources for such a time, rather than avoid it.

Likewise, a parent will not tell their fifteen year old son who has been wronged by a fellow-member of their church youth group, “Bill, just ignore George,” thinking, “Well, Bill is just a teenager and shouldn’t be expected to deal with such a situation.” No, the gospel-directed, biblically-wise parent will see this as an opportunity for Bill to learn not only biblical principles (“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault,” Mt. 18:15), but also to have to look to Christ for grace in a difficult situation. What a great opportunity for gospel-directed growth!¹⁸³

It Must Model The Gospel

An easy mistake for Christian parents to make is to assume they must set as perfect an example as they can when it comes to all the best Christian virtues. The reality is that when this becomes the goal inevitably moms and dads must be selective in the degree to which they allow sons and daughters into their world. What is more, the lesson learned, if children buy in, is that to be a good Christian, you must be “the kind of person Mom and Dad are.” As a result, they will either eventually give up because they can’t measure up or if they come to believe they can be a good person like they think their parents are, they will set the wrong goals and will falsely conclude the Christian life can be lived without Christ.

Rather than trying to set the perfect example, parents should model for children what it means to be in step with the gospel. Children should learn from mom and dad that only in Christ do we have the strength to face the schemes of Satan; deal with life’s afflictions; find the desire and wherewithal to be generous, cheerful givers of self, time, and resources; love God and others; forgive others; teach the gospel to others; and ask for

forgiveness when we have sinned (Mt. 18:21-35; 28:20; 2 Cor. 8:9; 9:6-15; 12:9; Eph. 4:29-32; 6:10; Phil. 2:1-4f.).

O, parent, pray that if there is anything our children learn from us it will be they must continually turn away from trust in other gods and instead look trustingly to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, if they are to run with endurance the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1-2)!

If the Church is to be directed by the gospel when it comes to evangelism, its view toward change and growth, and in its Word ministries, as we have argued in these last four chapters, then it must give attention to how it is structured. We turn to that subject in the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

The older I get the more I find myself starting sentences this way, “The older I get...,” or “the longer I live...,” and then finishing them with some discovery I have made. So, forgive me, but here it goes: The longer I am in pastoral ministry, the more I realize that within the evangelical Church-at-large there is typically a very weak understanding of what the Bible teaches about the Church. For the average Christian it is understood that being part of a local congregation does not save a person. This is about as far as the typical doctrine of the Church goes. What this inadequate stance typically leads to is a depreciation of the importance of Christian community and assembling together regularly.

Of course, the doctrine of the Church is usually shaped for good or bad by leadership. So, we should not be surprised to find that evangelical pastors typically are not much better off when it comes to this topic. For them, the “party-line” is often that the Bible really does not give us that much in the way of specifics about how the Church is to operate or be structured. The end-result is that the latest fad or movement, whether it is a business model of leadership, a seeker-sensitive approach, being purpose-driven, being missional, church growth principles, or even the surrounding culture drives the discussion about how the Church is to operate.¹⁸⁴ Within such contexts, a conversation about the biblical teaching on Church ministry philosophy and structure would be thought to be almost nonsensical. Yet, as Mark Dever aptly explains, nothing could be further from the truth.

As Christians we strive to found our lives on the teaching of Scripture. The question, though, must be asked: Does Scripture deal clearly with questions about the polity, or organization, of

the church? And if so, what exactly does Scripture teach about it? Of course, we Christians believe that Scripture is sufficient for our preaching and discipling, for our spirituality and joy in following Christ, for church growth and our understanding of evangelism. But is Scripture even meant to tell us how we are to organize our lives together as Christians in our churches, or are we left simply to our own investigation of best practices? Is our church polity a matter indifferent? Is it a matter to be determined simply pragmatically, by whatever seems to work best and to most effectively avoid problems?

I believe that God has revealed in his Word all that we need to know in order to love and serve him, and this includes what we need to know even about the organization of our churches.¹⁸⁵

Dever is right. The Church must come back to the Scriptures in how it operates. This is not only because the Bible does give more guidance in this arena than is commonly concluded, but also because when the Church is in step with the gospel, it understands there are significant implications for how the Church is the Church. Tim Keller explains:

The gospel creates a culture called The Church. It's not just an aggregation of saved individuals. It's a culture. The gospel is so different in what it says about God, you, and your standing with God. It's so identity-transforming; every other religion or system motivates you through fear and pride to do the right thing. Only the gospel motivates you through joy . . . the fear and trembling joy . . . the fear of God joy. That doesn't mean that now we are a bunch of saved individuals with wonderful internal fulfillment. It means that when we get together we want to do things differently. We will do everything differently.¹⁸⁶

More specifically, “the structure of the church’s corporate life together is tightly tied to the content of the gospel, and the content of the gospel is tightly tied to the structure of the church’s corporate life together. They shape and implicate one another.”¹⁸⁷ This is to say that the gospel will direct how a local congregation operates and, at the same time, how a local congregation operates will in turn shape how it views, shares, and lives out the implications of the gospel.

How might the structure of a church’s corporate life negatively shape the gospel? One way would be diminish the role of preaching, in favor of more dialogue. This has a tendency to elevate “supposed insights” into the Christian life and what we have done and are doing over the joyful proclamation of what God has done, is doing, and will do in

and through us. It is to turn upside down the Word of God with the result, as Paul has written, “the cross of Christ [is] emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1:17).

Another way to see that structure can negatively impact the gospel is to consider the degree to which a congregation is intentional about forming small communities in which Christians can “exhort one another...that none...may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” and this all because “we share in Christ,” “share in a heavenly calling,” and “hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Heb. 3:1, 6, 13, 14). In other words, Christians must help each other see that we are strengthened by the gospel (Rom. 16:25) and how to walk “in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14). When this does not happen, typically Christians drift away from a gospel-directed life into one that is driven by themselves or principles and is more about what I do, rather than what Christ does in me.

Though an entire book could be written on this subject, what I want to do is highlight some of the most important ramifications the gospel has for the structure and operation of a local congregation.

An Emphasis On Biblical Preaching

A church that grasps the core truth of the Bible is the good news of how God has accomplished through his Son the redemption of his people and is applying the same to them, the result is that this gospel is taught, the need for the gospel is explained, and its ramifications are outlined. Does this mean the proclamation has to be by a pastor standing behind a pulpit in front of people sitting in pews or chairs? No! It can be in a small Bible study of a brand new church plant, it can be in a house church, but such proclamation will take place. Does this mean there can be no discussion among the

people at all? Of course not! They can discuss the sermon afterwards, as some of the Bible fellowships in our own congregation do, or they can have Bible studies in which discussion of the studied material is at the heart. But, there is always an emphasis placed upon the proclamation of the good news, both for the unsaved and the saved.

This also entails proclamation and teaching about how the entire Bible and how each book centers around the good news of Christ (Biblical Theology); as well as who God is, why only he can save, how he saves, why it had to be his son, how the Spirit works to apply salvation, why only the Scriptures reveal this message (Systematic Theology); and also how this gospel shapes discipleship, soul cure, gives hope, and empowers ethical living (Practical Theology). Without a doubt, the gospel-directed church is at one and the same time very doctrinal and very practical—both based upon a solid foundation of preaching.

The Presence Of A Plurality Of Biblical Elders

As we have just summarized and as we have seen in detail throughout the first eight chapters of this book, the gospel-directed church has at its core the proclamation of the Word of God, the core of which is the gospel. One of the ways God has provided for the preservation of this core value is by establishing a plurality of biblically-shaped elders to lead each congregation.

That there were multiple elders in each congregation as recorded in the New Testament (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1) and that these elders comprise the same ministry as overseers and pastors (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1, 2) is well established by the biblical evidence. Additionally, it is well established that whether these elders/pastors are vocational or non-vocational,¹⁸⁸ their primary tasks

revolve around Word and prayer-related ministries within the body (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:2-5; Tit. 1:9-10; Jam. 5:14).¹⁸⁹ In fact, a comparison of the qualifications of overseers (aka pastors and elders) and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 reveals that a difference between the two offices is that the elders must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). In fact, Paul writes in Titus 1:9 an elder must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”¹⁹⁰

Here is the main point. The primary leaders within a local church, those who are tasked with giving it direction and overseeing the main focus of ministry, that of making disciples to the glory of God, are men who know, live out, are able to teach, and able to defend the Word of God, the core of which is the gospel. That there are to be multiple elders given this task is most likely divinely designed so that the very thing can happen among them as did among Paul and Peter as recorded in Gal. 2:14, namely, if an elder gets out of step with the truth of the gospel, another capable teacher can hold him accountable and correct him.

It seems to be in line with the New Testament that multiple men who meet the qualifications of those who are overseers (aka pastors and elders) are one of the ways gospel centrality and gospel accuracy are preserved.

Also noteworthy is the ramification that these elders, like with Timothy, are tasked with doing the “work of an evangelist” (*euaggelistēs*, 2 Tim. 4:5). As D. A. Carson has explained, this is gospel work that not only deals with teaching of the good news to the unsaved, but also to the saved that they might be strengthened by it.¹⁹¹ Doing gospel work, then, comprises the work of the leaders of the Church.

Yet, as elders lead the Church, they must also be shaped by the truth of the gospel in how they go about their leading and teaching.

...we must recognize that Christian authority—gospel authority—is of a fundamentally different nature than worldly authority since it works by the power of the Spirit, not by the power of the flesh. The church's or pastor's authority does not root in the consent of those whom it governs. Rather, it roots in the authority of Jesus himself. But it always appeals to those whom it governs so that they might consent with one mind in the Spirit. It recognizes that any action that must be coerced or manipulated is not a true act of faith and therefore is not an act of true righteousness. It refrains from manipulative action. It doesn't puff out its chest and lay down the authority card whenever it can. Rather, it engages people in love. It spends time with them and gets to know them. It appeals to the Holy Spirit within them, calling them to greater and greater holiness.¹⁹²

What, then, are some of the characteristics that mark leadership in step with the gospel?¹⁹³

- It is by faith, relying upon God to make change, believing he has the power to change and we do not.
- It exhorts the heart before the will, the desires ahead of actions.
- It appeals to saints based upon their position in Christ, not their flesh.
- Trusting in God's providence and his promises, it is exceedingly patient and tender, knowing that only God can give growth (1 Cor. 3:5-9). A mature pastor rarely asks for more than 1-2 steps at a time from immature believers, thought many steps may need to be taken in the future. This follows the example of Jesus Christ (Mt. 11:28-30).
- Though it is patient, kind, tenderhearted, addressing people where they are, nevertheless, it does not shy away from setting the bar high—at a point people cannot reach on their own, since the gospel is about helping saints reach such heights by grace.

One of the promises set forth in the Old Testament, as it looked forward to the New Covenant, was that better shepherds would be given to God's people than what they typically had under the Old Covenant, shepherds (i.e. pastors) who would truly care for

the people and teach them rightly (Jer. 3:15; 23:4). This is one of the glories of pastors indwelt by the Spirit and in step with the gospel. Such leadership is a great blessing to the people of God!

The Development Of Gospel-Directed Communities

As God graciously works through his Spirit in his saints to convince them and enable them in Christ to live by faith-fueled obedience to his glory, one reality quickly becomes evident and that is how easily they can be deceived and turn to idolatry.¹⁹⁴ To counter this, within the epistolary sermon he wrote to call believers to persevere, the author of Hebrews writes (3:12-14): “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13**But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **14**For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

Notice that the antidote is that fellow believers “exhort one another every day”. In other words, there must be some Christians who know us well enough and some we know well enough that we can see each other’s heart going awry into evil and unbelief, to the point it is hardened by deceitfulness which flows from our sin nature. And what is more, we call each other to change, to be encouraged when down or we correct each other when going the wrong direction, and all based upon the truth of God’s Word. This is what it means to “exhort one another.”

I see no other conclusion we can come to in this text than that Christians must know a small group of other Christians well enough they can be specific in helping each other fight deceitfulness and idolatry and to trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ in very specific

ways for growth. What this means is that the church directed by the gospel will be intentional in forming small communities of people who can help each other walk in step with the gospel.

This actually brings us back to the initial text we looked at in this book: Titus 2. There we saw how the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms us and makes us zealous for good works (2:11-14). Yet, we must not forget those verses ground the exhortations of Titus 2:1-10, where saints are called to honor God. Yet, Paul makes it clear that there must be teaching and training from one believer to another (from Titus to the entire church in general and to younger men in particular; as well as from older women to younger women, 2:1, 4, 6) in order for this grace to be put into practice.

The picture we glean from Hebrews 3 and Titus 2 is that the communities of believers should be relatively small—small enough that people know each other well—and in some cases it would be helpful to have one-on-one or one-on-two interactions. This is also suggested by Paul's exhortations to Timothy to pass on to faithful men what Paul had taught in such a way they could turn around and teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). How could Timothy know whether or not men were faithful, unless his relationships with them were close enough to know some specifics? This is more likely speaking of working with a few men at a time rather than large numbers.

There is no question about it that gospel-directed churches have believers in community with small enough numbers of others that specific gospel-directed heart work can be done with knowledge of where each other is at. This becomes especially important if a congregation wants to be faithful to the mandate that believers corporately are to show the world the reality of their profession by their love for one another (John 13:34-35) and

they are corporately to proclaim the excellencies of Christ as his spiritual house and priesthood, his people (1 Peter 2:4-10).¹⁹⁵ Because of this, when those who profess Christ go astray, to guard the testimony of the Church, and to act as family members do who care for each other, we are to restore such persons and, if need be, excommunicate them if they remain unresponsive (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thes. 3:15). Such a process demands small numbers of people are in community and know each other well enough to see there are problems inconsistent with the entailments of the gospel.

An Example Of Gospel-Shaped Congregational Structure

Our own local church is organized around small groups of believers (ideally no more than 10-12 people) we have labeled Bible Fellowships. They are so labeled since they exist primarily to partner together to do gospel work in the lives of each other and in the lives of those outside the church with whom they work, to whom they are related, and among whom they are friends. Some of these groups do Bible studies together, some of them discuss the sermon from the previous Sunday (or that morning in the case of those that meet on Sundays after the service), all of them pray together, all of them do life together and support one another, all of them encourage each other in living out the ramifications of the gospel, and all of them are encouraged to invite unsaved friends and/or family to the group. Additionally, we encourage groups of 2-3 women or 2-3 men out of these groups form what we call Iron Woman teams and Iron Man teams. As iron sharpens iron, so each of these persons on these small teams sharpen each other (Prov. 27:17) to walk in step with the gospel.

One of the primary tasks of our elders (vocational and non-vocational) is to oversee these Bible Fellowships, especially since they are the primary way in the congregation

people are supported and encouraged in time of need, the primary means of outreach, and also the primary means of raising up leaders and future elders.

We understand that one of the chief culprits in congregations is to lead people and families to be so busy, families cannot help each other walk in step with the gospel and the congregation cannot build relationships with each other and with the lost to do gospel work. So, rather than seeking to have a separate program for evangelism, one for discipleship, one for leadership development, one for prayer, and one for support in soul cure, we seek to carry out all these purposes primarily through our Bible Fellowships.¹⁹⁶ Of course, this does not mean there is nothing else we must do, after all, we must have additional training for Bible Fellowship leaders and elders, and we also have teaching for children, and conferences that help equip and grow believers. Yet, this is one example of many ways a congregation can order itself in a way that is in step with the gospel.

Such gospel work that makes disciples to the glory of God is the heart of the mission of the Church and all the Church does to fulfill that mission (See Appendix 4 and how this applies to corporate worship). However, there are also other entailments that arise from the gospel that shape how the Church relates to the world beyond teaching the gospel to the lost. This will be our focus in our last two chapters.

CHAPTER TEN

MERCY MINISTRY ON THE PERSONAL LEVEL IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

“Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” This quote, often wrongly attributed to Francis of Assisi,¹⁹⁷ has become the mantra of many who desire to emphasize the importance of the Christian’s actions, of their living out the gospel. However, as we have seen throughout this book, the gospel is good news to be proclaimed. As such, the above saying “makes about as much sense as telling a reporter he should broadcast the news but that words are optional.”¹⁹⁸ This is important to note since the primary mission of the Church is thought by many to encompass social justice, alleviating suffering, and changing political structures for the better. Yet, as Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert rightly assert: “The mission of the church is summarized in the Great Commission passages—the climactic marching orders Jesus issues at the ends of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts.... The church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations.... This is our unique and central calling.”¹⁹⁹

I wholeheartedly agree that the primary mission of the Church is to proclaim the gospel with the goal of making disciples to the glory of God. When we keep this as the primary mission of the Church, we accomplish some very important outcomes.

- We remain in line with God’s ultimate commission given to the Church (Mt. 28:19-20).
- We preserve the reality that though our physical life and well-being are important (James 2:16; 1 Jn. 3:17-18), nevertheless, priority is given to our eternal well-being (Mt. 10:28; 16:26). More to the point, “We remind ourselves that as Christians we desire to relieve all suffering, from the temporal to the eternal,”²⁰⁰ and not merely just the temporal.

- We remember that God receives the most glory when his grace is on display and, as such, discipling through gospel proclamation will always remain a priority. Additionally, when mercy ministry is carried out it will be in the name of Christ, as an outgrowth of his grace in us (Mt. 5:16; 2 Cor. 8:1-9; 9:6-15; Eph. 1:6-14).
- We keep as our ultimate mission that which will bring the greatest and most widespread good throughout the world—namely gospel proclamation leading to true conversion. When people are in Christ and thus become new creations, it makes a radical difference in how they treat their family, the ways in which they interact with neighbors, how they go about engaging in the public square²⁰¹ as mere citizens or as leaders, and how they relate to the pain and suffering of the world (they are more likely to care about it and to take action in ways that help people holistically). Simply-put, when the Church fruitfully carries out its mission, the result is the raising up of an army of people who will go out into the world to love the world in gospel-driven, God-honoring ways. Without such a mission, philanthropists will meet physical needs, but not address the whole person or eternity. Eventually, such gospel-less philanthropy will run the risk of severing the people it is helping from the life-transforming gift of God in the gospel!

So, I wholeheartedly agree that the ultimate mission of the Church is discipling through gospel work, and all for the fame of God’s name. Yet, as we saw in the first two chapters of this book, when the gospel is proclaimed and people are transformed by the grace of God in Christ, there is both an inescapable logic and outcome of that grace, namely, that those who are redeemed are “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Though the concept of “good works” in the mind of Paul means far more than engaging in mercy ministry to those who are in need or suffering in this world, it does not mean less (Titus 3:14).²⁰²

It has been my experience through almost forty years of knowing Christ and interacting with his people that one way or the other and to different degrees Christians tend to help others on personal and public levels with shelter, finances, medical care, and friendship.²⁰³ I saw this when I was at Liberty Baptist College (now Liberty University)

with the extensive ministries to unwed mothers, alcoholics, and those in need of food and clothing by the college's founding church, Thomas Road Baptist Church. I also saw it during that same time of life on a summer missions trip to Los Angeles in the extensive ministries to the poor of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church. I have served congregations in three different areas in the United States and in each place it has been my experience that, at least to some degree, God's people want to help those in need and they do so.

This has also been verified by looking at evidence from the larger Church currently and also from history. In a February 1, 2003 *Christianity Today* interview Agnieszka Tennant spoke with Ram A. Cnaan about his book *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* (New York University Press, 2002). Cnaan argues that all 251 American and 46 Canadian congregations he studied believed they were called to help the poor and were attempting to do at least something.²⁰⁴

Such a view has a long tradition. The self-centered, largely uncaring, cruel Roman Empire was infused with a sense of charity toward the poor because of the influence of the early Church that was shaped by God's grace in Christ and rested upon God's sovereign care of and provision for his people.²⁰⁵ This positive, compassionate shaping of culture continued throughout the Middle Ages wherever the true gospel-shaped, gospel-understanding Church thrived and spread.²⁰⁶

With the Reformation and a burgeoning of biblical literacy and gospel transformation also came renewed care for the poor. In sixteenth century Geneva, Switzerland and in Germany John Calvin and Martin Luther, respectively, gave significant energy to directing a biblically-based diaconate to care for the poor, which included short-term

welfare, providing tools that they might work for pay and also helping to grow businesses that could provide long-term employment.²⁰⁷ This same Scripture-shaped charitable note was struck among the English and New England Puritans of the next two centuries.²⁰⁸

Such an outcome of the gospel continued to be felt into the 18th century with the Wesley and Whitefield revivals. These “were tremendous in calling for individual salvation, and thousands upon thousands were saved. Yet even secular historians acknowledge that it was the social results coming out of the Wesley revival that saved England from its own form of the French Revolution.”²⁰⁹ Additionally, it led to the abolition of slavery in England through the perseverant leadership of Christian statesman, William Wilberforce.²¹⁰

Such a pattern for the display of mercy has marked Christianity, people, and whole societies impacted by the Christian Faith.²¹¹ This is seen with stark clarity when we remember that of the top ten countries who gave aid to those ravaged by the December 26, 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, not one of them was a Muslim country, yet, several had histories of Christian influence. This is significant since the most devastated country, Indonesia, has the world’s largest Muslim population. Yet, time and time again this has been the pattern. Christianity stands out far and above other world religions when it comes to the capacity to affect the ministry of mercy.²¹²

It has been my experience that even in congregations where doctrine was not that important or where doctrine was twisted, the presence of the call to mercy ministry in Scripture, along with the conviction of the Spirit, were so strong that saints still engaged in it. Sometimes it is done in less-than-wise ways or with less-than-biblical motives, but it

seems to be the case that wherever the gospel spreads, ministry to the physical needs of people follows—at least to some degree.

But, we must be clear. Because of sin that dwells in our flesh (Rom. 7:17-18), working in and through false teaching and beliefs (what James 2:14-26 and 1 John 3:16-18 address), it often happens that Christians who have been redeemed to be people zealous for good works justify in their hearts their lack of generosity and love.²¹³ This is why Paul had to exhort the Corinthians to follow through on a previous commitment they had made to help fellow believers in need (2 Cor. 8:10) and part of the way he did this was to teach them that such generous love was an outgrowth of God's grace in Christ operating upon them and it actually helped to demonstrate the genuine nature of their confession of faith (2 Cor. 8:1-5, 8; 9:8-14).

So, it does matter whether or not we apply the gospel to our ministry of mercy or not. That is why we want to explore in these last two chapters what such service of those in need looks like when it is directed by the good news of Jesus Christ. We want first to look at the personal level in this chapter. How will the gospel direct the Church when it comes to addressing shelter, finances, medical care, and friendship needs among individuals or communities? Then, in Chapter 11 we want to look at the public Square. In what way does the gospel direct the involvement of the Church in regard to public policy? Certainly, an important part of this topic is whether or not such activities are even part of the calling of the Church.²¹⁴

Preach And Teach Gospel-Shaped, Practical Doctrine

What we have discovered over and over again in this book is that the preaching and teaching of the gospel brings about powerful outcomes. This is certainly true when it

comes to mercy ministry. It is why Paul wrote that we were redeemed to be a people “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14), which includes devotion “to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need” (Titus 3:14).

The reality is that the more we know the gospel, the more we should be passionate about ministries of mercy. Philip Ryken agrees:

A few years ago a team of sociologists visited [the congregation where I was on staff,] Philadelphia’s Tenth Presbyterian Church. They were conducting a study of churches that were involved in mercy ministry. When they were finished, they gave us a chance to read over their report before they published it, in case we noticed any mistakes. The report was very well done, but there was one sentence I told them I could not agree with. Basically it said something like this: “Tenth is deeply committed to teaching and preaching biblical doctrine; however, it also has a heart for mercy ministry.” I told them, “Look, all you have to do is change one word in that sentence and I’ll be satisfied. Take the word “however” and change it to “therefore”: “Tenth is deeply committed to teaching and preaching biblical doctrine; therefore, it also has a heart for mercy ministry.”²¹⁵

Certainly 16th century Geneva experienced the power of the gospel to bring about mercy ministries and changes that greatly benefited all. Again, Ryken explains:

Prior to the Reformation, [Geneva] was infamous for its immorality. Among its common vices were drunkenness, disorderly conduct, gambling, and prostitution.... When the Reformation came to Geneva, the city’s Council of Two Hundred passed civic ordinances that were designed to promote the Protestant religion and restrain public indecency. Yet the Council quickly discovered that laws alone made little difference; what was needed was a change of heart. There would be no social transformation without biblical proclamation. So the Council decided to do something that no city council would even think of doing today: they hired a theologian, John Calvin. The way Calvin reformed Geneva was simply by preaching the Bible, teaching the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Calvin preached verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book. He preached five, six, seven times a week. And he preached what people eventually called Calvinism: the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. The result was not just that people came to Christ and grew in grace, but that the whole urban environment was transformed by the practical application of gospel mercy. Taverns were closed, reducing alcoholism. Sewers were cleaned, eliminating illness. The refugees that were streaming to Geneva from all over Europe were offered Christian hospitality. Deacons were organized to care for the poor. A job program was developed in the clothing industry. Schools were opened, not just for boys, but also for girls. One visitor said that under the teaching of sound doctrine, with its faithful application in practical mercy, the city of Geneva had become “the wonderful miracle of the whole world.”²¹⁶

The ministry of mercy emerges from gospel transformation because love and kindness are part of the Spirit's fruit produced in the saint (Gal. 5:22; 1 John 4:7-8). Additionally, there is the ability and desire to obey the Word of God and to resemble our Creator, in whose image we have been made (Rom. 1:5; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24; 5:1-2; Phil. 2:13).²¹⁷ What is more, we not only see the Bible commands us to help those in need (e.g. Ps. 112:9; Prov. 14:21, 31; 17:5; 21:13; 22:9; Is. 1:17; 58:6-7; Acts 20:35; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15; Eph. 4:28; James 1:27), we understand that such loving, generous, gracious, merciful relating with others flows out of the shape of the gospel itself (e.g. Mt. 10:8; Phil. 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 8:9).²¹⁸

The more we grasp everyone is made to glorify God by resembling and representing him, yet all are sinners and under his wrath because of rebellion against him, the more we grasp that all of us are needy, all of us are truly poor before him (Mt. 5:3). Additionally, those of us poor who have been made rich in Christ (2 Cor. 8:9), have had our wealth freely given to us out of love and the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. When we begin to grasp all this, we understand that gospel-directed hearts and behavior are marked by love and grace for others!²¹⁹

Since the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16) and such changed people are regenerated to be zealous for the good works of helping with urgent needs (Titus 2:14; 3:14), and since the gospel is also what motivates us toward mercy ministry through the model and pattern it sets forth, nothing can be more effective within a congregation to move it in this direction than teaching the gospel. This is especially true when the gospel is surrounding by good rich biblical doctrine and the call to put this teaching into practice.²²⁰

Some of us may object to this teaching that the gospel will bring about the ministry of mercy in true believers, since we all know plenty of those who profess Christ, yet have no such passion. “Though it may not be in evidence, a heart for the poor sleeps in all Christians until someone preaches grace in connection with the ministry of mercy. This ‘pushes a button’ deep within our soul, and we begin to wake up.”²²¹ This is evidenced in the inclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37), Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians that they would follow through on helping the poor (2 Cor. 8-9), in Paul’s teaching to Titus that the gospel brings about people zealous for good works, those who address urgent needs (Titus 2:11-14; 3:14), and in the teaching of James that pure and undefiled religion involves this, “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). In each of these cases the argument is being made that a ramification of the gospel is mercy ministry. Likewise, in each of these cases, it is expected that God’s Spirit working through his Word will bring about such a passion and activity.

We must bring wisdom to this subject and realize that though all Christians should engage in mercy ministry to some degree, the amount to which each is involved will differ from person to person. While some saints will be divinely compelled to be in a vocation that is consumed by mercy ministry (mercy missions or running a homeless shelter) or to adopt one or even several orphans, others may primarily support financially and with prayers such ministries. Nevertheless, the gospel preached, received, and applied should lead to some level of involvement.

This raises a question: Is mercy ministry to be carried out just individually by people who are in the church or also corporately by the church? In light of the presence of

deacons in the church and the ministry to which they are called (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1), as well as calls to whole churches to help those in need along with instructions on how to do that (cf. Gal. 6:1-10; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Tim. 5:3-8; Titus 3:14), local churches corporately do have a calling.²²² Like with individuals, so entire congregations will be involved to different degrees, yet all should be involved in some capacity.²²³

Give Help In The Name Of Christ

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians to motivate them to follow through on giving to help poor fellow Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8-9), he said the outcome would be that those helped would glorify God based upon a twofold foundation: “because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.” In other words, it will be because the giving Corinthians profess to know Jesus Christ as Savior and are giving the help for that reason, as well as the fact that they are giving generously. To claim to know Christ, but not to give to help those in need may show a false profession (1 Jn. 3:16-18). To give to help those in need without professing Christ or without doing it in the name of Christ, does not lead the recipients to glorify God.

When the Church is directed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, they will desire to glorify God and to see those being helped embrace Jesus Christ. As such, when gospel-shaped mercy ministry takes place, it is done in the name of Christ (Mt. 18:5). Also it will include teaching the gospel to any recipients who may not know Jesus Christ (Col. 1:28).

In fact, the practice of mercy ministry and evangelism is a powerful combination (Acts 4:32-35). Many congregations have demonstrated this. One such is example is First Baptist Church of Leesburg, Florida.

The most visible indicator of [their] mission is the church's "Ministry Village," which is adjacent to the church in downtown Leesburg. Three brick buildings are home to residences for homeless men, abused women, and children needing shelter because of family emergencies. Three more buildings house a benevolence center, a family resource center, and a village thrift store, all of which help with the material needs of the poor. A seventh building houses a medical care center.²²⁴

When asked whether or not these mercy ministries are taking away from the primary mission of the Church, i.e. sharing the gospel, Executive Pastor at the church, Art Ayris, answered, "Our church for over 20 years was in the top one-quarter of 1 percent among Southern Baptist churches for evangelism. A lot of people come to Christ because of some difficulty or personal need in their life. At the most impressionable time in their life we're there with them in a tangible way. One year at the women's shelter literally almost every woman there received Christ."²²⁵

Have The Right Motivation

In chapters three and four we discovered that the gospel pattern which permeates Scripture involves man coming to see his helplessness apart from God's salvation in Christ and, once one comes to this salvation by faith, the result is faith-fueled obedience that glorifies God. It is this gospel pattern, this glorious good news that should serve as the motivation for mercy ministry. "The only true and enduring motivation for the ministry of mercy is an experience and a grasp of the grace of God in the gospel. If we know we are sinners saved by grace alone, we will be both open and generous to the outcasts and the unlovely."²²⁶ Knowing that freely we have received, freely we desire to give (Mt. 10:8); knowing that we have been loved in our plight, even when we do not deserve it, we love others in their plight (Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Jn. 4:19); and knowing God has decreed our glorification (Rom. 8:30), we desire to glorify God beyond all other desires (1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31).

To look at this from another perspective, the regenerated heart, the one who has been made a new person, loves God (Pss. 91:14; 145:20; Mt. 22:37-38; 25:14-30 [esp. 24]; Rom. 8:28; Jam. 1:12; 1 John 5:1-5) and a significant outcome of that love is trusting God so that a person follows him and does that which pleases him (Jn. 10:27; 14:15; 15:10; Col. 1:10; 1 Thes. 4:1), a great part of which is glorifying the Father and Son (Mt. 5:16; Jn. 5:23; Phil. 2:15), and a saint cannot glorify God without loving others (Mt. 22:39-40; 1 Cor. 10:23-33; 2 Cor. 9:6-15).

When Christians reach out to each other or to unbelievers with mercy,²²⁷ there are multiple motivations (benefiting others because we love them, sharing with others because we have been made rich in Christ), yet the ultimate motivation is to put the Savior and his grace on display. Certainly the motive is not to earn favor with or salvation from God, nor is it to win the approval of other people through our philanthropy, nor is it to lead the person helped to trust in us (for we are to decrease and Christ increase, Jn. 3:30!). According to Paul, having the right motives will not only determine whether or not we give of self, time, and resources, but it will also determine whether or not we give cheerfully in a way that truly honors God (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

Practice A Fully Biblical Approach To Mercy Ministry

When we are exercising ministries of mercy with the right motives, in the name of Christ, and steeped in rich biblical doctrine, we will understand there are right and wrong ways to go about it. For example, there is a thread of teaching that runs through the Bible that shows forth the importance of work. It appears that one of the ways man was made in the image of the God (Gen. 1:26-28) who worked in creation (Gen. 1:1-25) was that he was created to create, work, and have dominion over creation as God's vice-regent (Ps.

8:5-6). This is why prior to the fall of mankind into sin, God commanded man to work (Gen. 2:15). It appears to be one of the ways man images and glorifies God. As a result, God has always valued hard work as opposed to laziness (e.g. Prov. 6:6-11; 10:3-4)²²⁸ and along with this affirms productive, God-honoring business practices (Prov. 31:18-21).²²⁹ It is only as we grasp this background that we see in its proper light Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." (2 Thes. 3:10). In context, this speaks of the person who has the ability to work, but is unwilling to do so. Such laziness is not only dishonoring to the God who created man to glorify him through work, but it is denigrating to an individual in that it denies the individual an important aspect of what it means to be a human made in God's image. What is more, it cuts him off from the very instrument God has given which can help provide for his needs on a daily and ongoing basis.

There is certainly a place for providing a "safety-net" for individuals and providing food, shelter, clothing, the paying of a utility bill, and the like on a short-term basis. However, the ultimate and most loving, gospel-focused manner in which a person can be helped is for them to have employment by which they experience the satisfaction and honor of work and by which they have on-going, not mere short-term help. What is more, when a person becomes dependent over a long period of time upon a congregation, another person, or a government entity for their provision, it can have the effect of making the giver a functional savior and keeping the person-in-need from seeing that every good gift and their daily bread come from God (Mt. 6:11; James 1:17). What is more, it may never require them to turn to the Lord for the help and salvation they need. This is why many have strongly suggested that well-meaning philanthropists who have

not encouraged employment as part of the fix for poverty have often done more harm than good in the long-run.²³⁰

Related to this emphasis upon work as the primary instrument of God's provision is the truth that when people are in need, the first line of help for them must come from family, if possible (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul says in this text (which, in context, is addressing how widows are helped) that "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Here we not only are reminded how important it is that a Christian help his own family in need, but also that if he does not, this is tantamount to professing that he really has not trusted in Christ, for he is not displaying the kind of heart and activity that emerges from being born-again. What is more, he is acting like an unbeliever and, in some cases, worse than an unbeliever. After all, even many unbelievers will care for their own family. How much more should a born-again family member do so!

Finally, in this same context (1 Tim. 5:3-16), Paul clarifies that help must be given to those in need in such a way that it does not encourage or engender unholy living. This is a reminder that the truly gospel-directed person understands that as important as physical needs are and helping to meet physical needs, where one stands with God is even more important. So, don't become their functional savior and don't create a situation in which they feel as if they never need to look to Christ!

Have A Strong Functioning Diaconate

Another way in which the Church is in step with the gospel when it comes to mercy ministry on the personal level is to follow the New Testament example of having strong, godly, functioning deacons in place. In Acts 6:1-7 we read that the Apostles called

together the Church to pick from among them “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to oversee the daily distribution to widows. This was so that the Apostles could devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word”. Though this text never calls these seven men “deacons,” it does use a related word that the ESV translates “distribution” in verse 1 and the verb form of the word is used in verse 2, translated by the ESV as “serve”. Because of this, most Bible students understand Acts 6 to outline the choice of the first deacons, an office that later in the Church was to be in place alongside elders (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). In light of Acts 6 and the reality that the main difference between elder and deacon qualifications was the latter did not have to be able to teach (compare 1 Tim. 3:1-7 with 3:8-13), it seems that deacons are tasked with both reducing the ministry load of elders and also overseeing mercy ministry.²³¹ Both areas of responsibility enable elders or pastors to give attention to overseeing prayer and Word ministries within a congregation.²³²

What it appears that the presence of the two offices accomplishes according to the New Testament teaching is that it assures there are two groups of capable men within a congregation who are making sure priority is given to the teaching and proclamation of the Word, the core of which is the gospel, and also that in addition ministries of mercy are carried out. I have witnessed churches through the years who had capable leaders who were quite passionate about mercy, yet they lacked leadership that shared that same level of passion for God’s Word. Eventually, the gospel is lost and the Word all but set aside. This eventually distorts ministries of mercy and will eventually cause them to dry up as the congregation dies. On the other hand, I have seen congregations strong in Word

ministry, yet who did not have a strong group of deacons overseeing ministries of mercy. In these cases, the ministry of mercy usually does not happen or it is very sparse.

The solution is to follow the New Testament and to have well-trained and well-taught men in place as both elders and deacons.²³³ This is a powerful combination, especially when elders are intentional in teaching and preaching God's Word, including those texts that call the Church to ministries of mercy. God's Spirit, working through the gospel-centered Word, bathed in prayer, and among his people, will create a people zealous for the good works of meeting urgent needs and all to God's glory (Mt. 5:16; Titus 2:14; 3:14)! This does not mean each congregation will look the same in its mercy ministry or be involved to the same degree. Some will start their own extensive ministries they run to help extend mercy, whereas others will partner with existing ministries. Yet, ministry of mercy will take place.

Look To Christ For Your Resources

The final directive we will focus on for ministries of mercy at the personal level clearly flows from what we have said throughout this book. We must always remember that if we are to persevere in extending mercy, especially in hard situations, and if we are to see eternal fruit born to the glory of God in such ministry, we must rely upon God's grace working in and through us to keep our desire to serve strong and to provide the necessary tangible and non-tangible resources. This is Paul's point in 2 Cor. 9:8 when he writes: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Then, in verse 15 he thanks God for "his inexpressible gift," which in context is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who makes us rich or wealthy in generosity (compare 2 Cor. 8:1 with 8:9) so we are able

and willing to give generously, cheerfully, sacrificially of self, time, and resources to his glory!

Something I have witnessed over the years among those who are involved on a day-to-day basis with people who have very difficult situations and great needs is that it is easy eventually either to give up because such service is hard or a person's heart can become hardened since there will be many situations when recipients of help take advantage of those helping them (or at least attempt to take advantage). This is why it is crucial to look regularly to Jesus Christ, to abide in him that lasting fruit might be born and disciples made to God's glory (John 15:1-16).²³⁴

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PUBLIC SQUARE MERCY MINISTRY IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

It has been my experience over the past thirty years that if you want to raise passionate debates among Christians (especially in the United States), all you need to do is bring up the topic of the relationship of the Church to the public square. There are strong opinions that tend to divide diverse sets of saints.²³⁵ I grew up in a fairly liberal household politically, one in which my father regularly affirmed, “the Church should not be involved in politics!” To a large degree, he had bought into the notion that a person’s faith, their religious beliefs, should be kept separate from the political arena. Though it is virtually an impossible position to hold to consistently (my dad opposed abortion, for example, based upon biblical authority), it is still argued by many.²³⁶

Similarly I have known many other Christians that argue for no (or very little) involvement of the Church in the public square because our priority is the gospel and so political issues should be left alone. Many who hold to this stance seem to think that giving priority to the gospel (along with understanding that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ) and significant political involvement are mutually exclusive. As an example, John MacArthur seems to lean in this direction when he writes:

*It is all right occasionally to support legitimate measures designed to correct a glaring social or political wrong.... A certain amount of healthy and balanced concern about current trends in government and the community is acceptable, as long as we realize that such interest is not vital to our spiritual lives, our righteous testimony or the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. Above all, the believer’s political involvement should never displace the priority of preaching and teaching the gospel because the morality and righteousness that God seeks is the result of salvation and sanctification.*²³⁷

From 1979 to 1984 I was at Liberty Baptist College, a time when Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority was in full-swing. During that time I saw and heard of much political influence

by Christians. What is more, I was significantly shaped by Francis Schaeffer through his writings and visits to Liberty. Because of these two key influences, I have been disposed through the years to see the need for Christian engagement in the public square. What this means is that I have rubbed shoulders with many proponents of Christian involvement. Rarely, if ever, have I encountered a Christian who is involved because they think certain political outcomes will bring eternal salvation to individuals or a nation. Yet, I have witnessed some less-than-the-best approaches. There have been times when some have come very close or crossed over a line and been driven by anger toward opposing positions, the need to preserve a certain traditional way of life, and there have been times when some have been so zealous for public square issues, their passion seemed to leave little room for the priority of the gospel.

I know why some have come to oppose much or any public square involvement by the Church.²³⁸ Based upon Christians who have been angry in their approach, who have lost sight of the importance of the gospel, or who have been driven by other lesser motives, it has become common to decry public square involvement. Yet, just because of weaknesses or abuses, we should not “throw the baby out with the bathwater!” I believe when the Church is in step with the gospel, that is when the good news of Jesus Christ is directing life and ministry, not only will engagement with the public square emerge, but it will be done largely in ways that avoid the abuses.

In the remainder of this chapter I will include a few directives for how public square influence should taken place when guided by the gospel and, along the way, prove the point that the gospel not only brings about such activity, but helps guard from excesses.

Follow Inescapable Gospel Logic: Be Involved

We have already discovered the inescapable gospel logic that leads to the conclusion that the change accomplished and applied by Jesus Christ through redemption should lead to the ministry of mercy shown to others (See Chapters 1-2, 10). Very few Christians would argue with that conclusion. What we must do, however, is take this one step further to see the importance of influencing the public square in order to extend mercy to its fullest. Let me offer two examples.

One of the wonderful growing movements within the Church of late has been that of adoption.²³⁹ It shows a wonderful way to extend mercy to orphans from abroad or from within one's own country. Similarly, many have a passion to provide medical care for children throughout the world who have cleft palates, lack clean water, are malnourished, or who struggle with health issues since their mothers may have poor pre-natal care.²⁴⁰ What Christian would not applaud such ministry or any congregation that mobilized believers to get involved? Love for children, born and unborn, is shared by any true follower of Jesus Christ. This sentiment also leads Christians to oppose abortion and pastors to affirm the sanctity of human life in their preaching. Yet, somehow, in the minds of some people, for the Church to mobilize people to address laws that will protect the life and health of the unborn or born child or to better the lives of children is somehow outside the boundaries of what is appropriate. Doesn't it make sense ethically that if we can serve as good Samaritans and influence the public square in such a way as to prevent travelers between Jerusalem and Damascus from being mugged that we ought to do so, rather than waiting until they are down and lying by the side of the road? This is not to suggest we can prevent sin or save people eternally by means of legislation, nor is it to argue this is more important than gospel work. It is, however, to suggest very

strongly that as an outgrowth of the love we have for people (which is itself an outgrowth of the gospel), we have a calling from God, for example, to work and pray toward preventing the brutal suffering that unborn children go through in abortion, as well as the post-abortion trauma parents, especially moms, face.²⁴¹ If we neglect such public square involvement altogether, it is the same as walking to the other side of the road!²⁴²

Let's take another example, that of poverty. Again, few would question whether or not a church should teach and mobilize people toward helping those who are poor—whether it involves helping serve meals at a local homeless shelter, ringing bells for the Salvation Army at Christmas, holding a food drive for a nearby food bank, or taking up collections for a congregation's deacon fund that is used to help those in need. Yet, it is only to take it another step to realize that one of the ways to help those who are poor in the fullest and most permanent way is to advocate public policy that supports wise economic approaches, that enables business to start and grow, that creates greater wealth, and all of this resulting in more jobs, less unemployment, and the ability for people to make a living and support their families. That the growth of business and wealth is one of the greatest ways to help those who are poor has historically been the position of Bible saturated Christians, such as John Calvin;²⁴³ it has been demonstrated in recent history;²⁴⁴ and it is still the position advocated by those who have a high view of Scripture and seek to apply its teaching to ethical issues of our day.²⁴⁵ In fact, Wayne Grudem is on target when he argues:

I believe the only long-term solution to world poverty is business. That is because businesses produce goods, and businesses produce jobs. And businesses continue producing goods year after year, and continue providing jobs and paying wages year after year. Therefore if we are ever going to see long-term solutions to world poverty, I believe it will come through starting and maintaining productive, profitable businesses.²⁴⁶

Then Grudem added after refuting those who believe business is somehow evil:

In fact, if the devil himself wanted to keep people created by God in the wretched bondage of lifelong poverty, it is hard to think of a better way he could do it than to make people think that business is fundamentally evil, so they would avoid entering into it or would oppose it at every turn. And so I suspect that a profoundly negative attitude toward business itself—not toward distortions and abuses, but toward business activity in itself—is ultimately a lie of the Enemy who wants to keep God’s people from fulfilling his purposes.²⁴⁷

Should not gospel-produced love in us propel us to stop and extend mercy to those who have been “mugged” by bad economic policies through advocating sound economic principles and valuing those who own and run businesses, rather than walking by on the other side of the road with the excuse, “Well, politics and economic issues are just not the proper activities of Christians”?

Richard Land and Barrett Duke understand that mercy ministry extended to the public square does not somehow oppose the primacy of the gospel, but instead flows from it:

Many have argued that political activism distracts the church from its primary mission of evangelism and disciple-making. We agree that the church’s first task is to win souls. Individual Christians should make evangelism their highest priority, and churches need to do so as well (Matt. 28:18-20). However, neither individual Christians nor churches can ignore what Jesus said about the need for the church to engage in culture. The Lord’s “Great Commission” to His followers was not only to evangelize, but to “make disciples” and to teach those converts “to observe everything I have commanded you,” which would include His expectation for them to act as salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16; 28:16-20). Cultural engagement is part of Christian discipleship.²⁴⁸

I suspect that the reticence of many Christians to have influence on the public square is a reaction against what they have perceived to be less-than-God-honoring methods they have witnessed—whether it is angry confrontations, name-calling, gospel-less activism that suggests all we need in a country is right laws, or zealous advocates who seem to suggest one must be part of a certain political party or way-of-thinking to be a Christian or to be comfortable in their church. Yet, poor approaches to the political arena should not lead us to think it wrong to be involved. Certainly the same is true of mercy ministries found in some homeless shelters. Just because we can run across a homeless shelter that

has lost sight of the gospel or is functioning in a way that is demeaning to the homeless, should not lead us to give up all ministry to the homeless! Likewise, we all know there are forms of evangelism that are not in step with the gospel. Yet, we do not cease evangelizing simply because some do it poorly. Neither should we give up on an entailment of the gospel simply because some do it poorly!

The fact of the matter is that wherever the gospel has gone forward in places where the citizens can have an impact on the political process, newly regenerated persons and revived saints have, as an outcome, sought to extend mercy in the public square without compromising the gospel. Here is one example:

*Under the ministry of Howell Harris, George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and those associated with them, the gospel, faithfully preached, transformed the social face of England. What receives the most press is the work of Wilberforce in driving through parliament legislation that shut down the slave trade and eventually abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. But movements led by Methodist converts also formed and directed trade unions that tamed the ugliest aspects of the industrial revolution, passed legislation that reformed prisons (not least the notorious debtors prisons), drove up the minimum age at which children could work (which took five-year-olds out of the mines), and took the first steps toward universal literacy. For about sixty years, the movement accomplished an astounding amount of social good, **while preserving the primacy of preaching the gospel and winning converts.**²⁴⁹*

Let Love Be Your Driving Force And Chief Mark

In Ephesians, after outlining the spiritual blessings we have from the Father in Jesus Christ (chapters 1-3, see esp. 1:3), Paul then calls us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1). In other words, we are to conduct ourselves in a manner that fits with, that is consistent with, that flows out of the work of Christ in us. In the rest of the letter he explains in detail this worthy walk. It includes being “imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk[ing] in love, as Christ loved us and gave

himself for us...” (5:1-2). This gospel-driven, loving manner has significant impact on how we speak and how we view others in our heart. Consider 4:29-32:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Certainly, one of the ways we grieve the Holy Spirit is to convey through our speech anger, bitterness, slander, and malice toward others. This is because love is part of the fruit the Spirit produces in true believers (Gal. 5:22).

What all this means is that for a Christian to approach issues of the public square with malice or anger toward others is not in keeping with the gospel. After all, “the anger of man never produces the righteousness that God requires” (James 1:20). When Christians speak with neighbors, city councilmen, senators, or congressmen about an issue, they must remember that only “the fool gives full vent to his spirit, but the wise man quietly holds it back” (Prov. 29:11). If we can approach issues in a calm, loving, Christ-like, yet firm manner, this not only represents our Lord well and honors him (Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Peter 2:9-17 [esp. 12]), it also is less likely to stir up unnecessary wrath from others (Prov. 15:1).²⁵⁰

One of the chief marks of our love as those who are part of the kingdom should be mercy (Mt. 5:7). What this means is that we should see the world as lost, with minds blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). Of course they are not going to act like Christians (1 Cor. 5:9-13)! Additionally, we should grieve over the plight they are in and long for them to be delivered out of that plight by Jesus Christ. It is true that Christians in settings all the way from local school board meetings to state capital buildings, to

Washington, D.C., must make their case for truth, that which is right, that which will honor God, and benefit other people—knowing full well that the goal is to persuade the regenerate and unregenerate alike. Nevertheless, we must always remember that winning that particular issue or battle is not our only goal. We want to make sure at the very least we do no unnecessary harm when it comes to us or someone else being able to wield God’s weapons in lives of the unregenerate that can be used to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).²⁵¹ Too often angry, brash, seemingly arrogant spokesmen for Christian values have won the present debating battle or issue, yet, at the same time, lost a larger war.²⁵² I do not believe we have to settle for an either/or approach (either we enter the political arena and do things the way the world does with a harsh, bitter, arrogant spirit so we can be heard and can win, or we stay out so we can win people to Christ). I believe since God has called us both to our ultimate mission of discipling to his glory and to the resultant mercy ministry in the public square, in Christ’s strength and wisdom we can have a both/and approach! And, in his strength we can carry out the will of God, to refrain from blasting those who set themselves up as our enemies (Lk. 9:51-56), but instead to love them (Mt. 5:43-47).

It must be understood, however, that the closer one gets to high-level, hard-hitting politics (at a state or national level especially), where almost everyone involved assumes that a person must be offensive to be heard, the more a Christian must have around him a set of gospel-directed friends who are willing to speak truth to him in love about how he is doing in the speak-the-truth-in-love-department, who will encourage him to engage by the power of Christ, and who will also pray with him to that same end.²⁵³

Teach That Public Mercy Ministry Is Important, But Not Primary

There are two ways in which the Bible sets forth the primacy of the gospel over public mercy ministry. To begin, even though the Bible very emphatically affirms the importance of creation, life in this world, and the need to address physical suffering among people (as we have argued throughout this chapter), it still holds out that where one stands with God is the most important matter that faces man (Mt. 16:26). This, coupled with the fact that gospel work, because it changes hearts and transforms the entire man, brings about the greatest good, leads to the conclusion that the gospel work of disciplemaking should have priority in the Church over public mercy ministry.

Second, we see this priority in the different spheres of oversight God has given to the state, society, and to the Church.²⁵⁴ Jesus alludes to the different spheres when he commands, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21). The state (or government) primarily is to provide defense from internal and external evil, punish wrongdoing, and function for the good of the people—all of which necessitates some taxation (Rom. 13:3-7; 1 Pt. 2:14), but should not involve onerous taxation or ownership of all businesses or property (Dt. 5:19; 17:16-17; 19:14; 1 Sam. 8:10-18). God has also instituted families and business owners, for example, to have oversight of (or delegated sovereignty over) the various areas of society. So, the government is not to own and run businesses, nor is it to be responsible for raising children. Likewise, individuals (e.g. fathers or business owners) are not to take justice into their own hands. This is the God-given responsibility of government (Rom. 13:3-4). Additionally, God has given delegated sovereignty to the Church in matters of his Word and gospel work. The government is not to run the Church, nor is the Church to

run the government. Yet, there is overlap in that Christians who make up the Church are to be involved in the government and the government is to provide order and defense for the area of their oversight, which includes the Church. So, the primary oversight God has given the Church is over its members (Mt. 18:1-20) and the gospel work of discipling (Mt. 28:18-20).

What this means is that the Church should always keep gospel work as the priority. Yet, as an outgrowth of that work, Christians must be taught they are to love neighbor on the personal and public level (the latter will move them to be involved in the public square).²⁵⁵ Even when the Church does a good job of teaching and modeling the priority of the gospel and the needed outgrowth of mercy ministry, because of indwelling sin, man will always wrestle with the right balance. This will always be exacerbated by the fact that some Christians within the Church will be especially called to give greater focus to public square ministry. Because of their passion and maybe even at times their imbalance, it may at least appear they are trying to make it the main thing. This should not dissuade the Church from involvement. Instead, Church leaders must consistently model and teach the right sense of priorities.²⁵⁶

Shape Involvement By Scripture, Not Political Pundits

Since obedience to God's revealed will as found in the Scriptures and arising from Christ-wrought faith is the outcome of salvation (Mt. 7:21-27; 28:20; Rom. 1:5), it stands to reason that our gospel-directed public square involvement will be driven by the Bible first and foremost, not merely by political thinkers or pundits.

Over the years I have benefited greatly from reading articles and books by Thomas Sowell, for example. His view of how economics works seems to be very much in line

with biblical teaching. As a result, he helps bring clarity to why economics work the way they do and even helps indirectly to demonstrate the importance of what the Bible teaches. Though it is true that there are many such persons who can help us gain clarity for the public square, our goal must never be to advocate merely what a person, political party, a candidate, or any other advocacy group believes. Our only ultimate and binding final source of authority must be God's Word.²⁵⁷ If we do not remember this and do not remain guarded toward other sources, it becomes far too easy for us to be shaped more by a union, talk show host, or a political leader than by what God has said.²⁵⁸

As we allow the Bible to provide the ultimate shape for our thoughts and public square ministry, we must always apply the pattern of the gospel. In other words, we must remember our chief goal is to glorify God by Christ-purchased faith that leads to God-honoring obedience, an obedience that is full of love for God and others. All along the way we are absolutely dependent upon Christ in us to carry this out. This will help us remember we all are sinners and must continually look to Christ and his Word for guidance, empowerment, and correction. We will remember that we cannot be involved in a God-honoring way unless we abide in Christ. And, we will remember the ultimate purpose for being involved is the glory of God and benefit we can bring to others. It is not to think that somehow our shaping of the political arena will be our or anyone else's ultimate salvation.²⁵⁹ This leads to our final point.

Don't Put Your Ultimate Trust In the Political Process

With his characteristic insightfulness, Marvin Olasky reminds readers we should not expect perfection in this world when it comes to the public square.²⁶⁰ After all, God made it clear in Genesis 3:17-19: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of

it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread....” Because we live in a fallen world, our mandate to have dominion over it and subdue it (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-6) will never be perfectly accomplished in this life. For such perfection we await the coming of Christ and the new heaven and earth (Rom. 8:19-25). This does not mean we should not be involved, or that we will not make a difference. We should expect many people to be helped, God to be glorified, and people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to come to Christ (e.g. Rev. 5:9-10). Yet, because of sin, no matter how well we work to extend mercy, there will always be poverty, corruption, and suffering until Christ returns. So, as Olasky encourages, “evangelicals should limit their expectations of—but not their involvement in—politics.” Even when things go very well and a society experiences gospel awakening and there are very significant cultural effects (as in England and America of the 18th-19th centuries), this will never usher in the ultimate glory.

So, we pray, work, serve, love, and live out the gospel, seeking to win as many as we can, seeking to benefit as many as we can, yet our “blessed hope” remains “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Such a works-producing bent (1 Cor. 15:58) remains the posture of the gospel-directed saint in this life!

CONCLUSION

I have often taught the various views with which we are to approach the Bible correspond to the different ways of seeing the earth that range from space shuttle to airplane, to helicopter, to street level. What we have done in this book is to apply this same strategy to discover that the gospel of Jesus Christ truly is the center of all the Scriptures and that this good news really is to direct the people of God in all we are and do.

From the space shuttle orbiting the earth astronauts see entire continents and oceans at once. Corresponding to this full-orbed view, we have seen that from Genesis to Revelation the Scriptures prepare for, explain, flow out of, and apply the gospel of Jesus Christ. More than this, they form a gospel pattern that teaches all of creation exists to glorify God, yet through the fall of man into sin, all of humanity falls short of this purpose and therefore stands under the wrath of God. What is more, mankind is broken, twisted, and, left to himself, would rather worship anything (including himself) than the true God. Yet, the glorious good news is that God, in his sovereign grace, has chosen to save a people for himself and to redeem this world through the life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. Through his saving work, believers of all walks of life receive the permanent indwelling of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. As a result, they change and grow through this Christ-accomplished presence of the Spirit and through this Spirit-applied union with Christ. This change and growth involve being remade more and more into the image of the God-man, as faith in God results in God-honoring, idol-smashing, loving obedience

of God. Man is absolutely and continually dependent upon the work of the triune God in him to bring about this transformation.

When our view reduced in altitude considerably to the equivalent of the gaze out an airplane window that can take in large detailed parts of the landscape below, we not only saw this gospel pattern supported from the structure of individual books of the Bible, we also learned that in the latter third of the Bible, the New Covenant believer is tasked with growing into the gospel clothes she has been given, as well as seeing all of Scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ. Once a person trusts Jesus Christ as her savior, from that time until she dies or Christ returns, she is called on as God's billboard to learn to apply, to live out, the perfectly sufficient resources given through Jesus Christ.

Once we descended to the helicopter level, just out of reach of the city's concrete peaks, we discovered from within smaller sections and paragraphs of God's Word this gospel is the means God uses to strengthen his Church and this good news is to cling to all that saints do, no less than the smell of smoke to returning firefighters. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's of the faith," but the "A-to-Z of the faith". Knowing and following the Savior along this line is Christ-dependent, not self-dependent; Christ-exalting, not self-exalting; sacrificially others-serving, not self-serving; humbly sin-admitting, not proudly self-defending; a trust in God's Spirit to empower and change, not the worship of our own ethical prowess and ministry creativity; an awareness we need each other, not acting like a Lone Ranger; and a bearing of fruit as lovers of God, not the barrenness that belongs to self-servers.

When we touched down on street level, what we found did not contradict any of the views from above, but we did find a great deal of gospel-direction for how to approach

growth, evangelism, teaching, preaching, counseling, parenting, how the Church operates together, and how to extend mercy to each other and outsiders. We learned that God has saved his people and continues to shape them into zealous practitioners of good works by the Son-purchased presence of his Spirit, working through his Word, in response to prayer, and among his people. To be in step with the gospel, then, means that all of our understanding of God, self, the world, purpose, and the future (all theology) flows from an understanding of the gospel and its ramifications. When this is understood and practiced, the Church approaches life and ministry centered around the truth of God, the core of which is the gospel, with continual dependence upon Christ, and an awareness that all God commands us to do, he also gives the resources whereby we can carry it out.

Finally, we have learned that when the Church is in step with the gospel, its motto is, “He must increase, but I must decrease!” And when this becomes reality, then truly the people of God are strengthened to obey him out of faith to his glory. And yet, when we fail, the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses us from all sin—lifting us up and enabling us not to lose hope. God receives the glory and we receive the benefit.

O, Lord, this is our life, our desire, our prayer, our passion. May it always be so!²⁶¹

APPENDIX ONE
STUDY QUESTIONS

Study Questions For The Introduction And Chapter One

1. What did Paul mean in Galatians 2:14 when he told Peter that he was not in step with the truth of the gospel?

2. What is the gospel and in what ways is the gospel necessary for Christians?

3. In what way does the gospel (Titus 2:11-12) relate to ethical commands (Titus 2:1-10)?

4. How is it that the saving work of Jesus Christ brings about the transforming work of the Holy Spirit?

5. Explain in your own words what it means to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live godly, self-controlled, upright lives. How can we help the Church do this?

6. If people are transformed by God's Spirit working through God's Word (especially the gospel), what ramifications does this have for how a local congregation functions? What ramifications does it have for how elders should lead (check out Titus 1:5-10 as well on this second question)?

7. What specifically has Titus 2:11-12 moved you to pray for you? For your family? For your church?

7. What specifically has Titus 2:11-15 moved you to pray for you? What about your family? What about your church?

Study Questions For Chapter Three

1. In this chapter we discover there is a gospel pattern in the Old Testament. Explain in your own words what this pattern is. In what way(s) did this surprise you?
2. Why do you believe it is important we understand all the Bible, even the Old Testament, is centered around the gospel? How does this change the way you read the Old Testament?
3. How is God's holiness related to his glory? Why is it important we come to see that God does all he does ultimately for his own glory?
4. Explain what sin is. How does it relate to God's glory? How is idolatry at the heart of all sin?
5. Explain how the Old Testament's teaching on man's helplessness, the need for dependence on God, and the importance of constant trust in God all prepare us for the full revelation of the gospel in the New Testament.

6. After reading this chapter, how would you now approach helping the youth mentioned at the beginning? How would your current approach differ from what it would have been before reading this chapter?

Study Questions For Chapter Four

1. How does our new identity in Christ shape us? In other words, what difference does it make for you in regard to sins with which you regularly struggle, pain you have experienced, or guilt that burdens you?
2. In what way(s) did this chapter change your view of the New Testament? How will you now read it differently?
3. In the letter to the Romans Paul addresses conflict, namely Jew/Gentile tensions. How does he do this? What application does this have for: How we teach? How we parent? How we provide counsel for others?
4. What is meant by faith-fueled obedience? Why is this phrase so important for the Christian?

5. How does all that God calls us to (e.g. ethical demands, ministry, love, faith, hope) flow out of the work he has done, is doing, and will do in us through Christ? In other words, how does it flow out of the gospel?

6. After reading all of Part 1, put in your own words what it means for the Church or an individual Christian to be in step with the gospel?

Study Questions For Chapter Five

1. Often teachers within the Church affirm that our message of the gospel does not change, but the methods can. Some even go so far as to suggest this means that almost any kind of method can be used for evangelism. After reading this chapter, do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

2. Explain what part the following play in evangelism: Proclamation of the gospel; a Christian's lifestyle.

5. What are some ways the Spirit of God pricked your conscience in regard to vivification? How do you need to improve in this area by the grace of Christ?

Study Questions For Chapter Eight

1. Explain in your own words why all Word ministry must be idol-smashing. Give an example of how you can do this in a setting in which you teach.
2. How do you bathe your Word ministry in prayer? In what ways, if any, do you plan on growing by the grace of Christ in this area?
3. What are some steps you can take to make your Word ministry more Christ-centered?

Study Questions For Chapter Eleven And The Conclusion

1. What was your view of public square involvement by the Church before reading this chapter? In what way, if any, has it changed?
2. In your own words, briefly outline the arguments in the chapter for involvement in the public square by Christians. Do you agree or disagree? In what way(s) do you believe God would have you be involved?
3. Have you ever been “turned off” by how you have seen Christians engage the public square? How was the approach not in step with the gospel? How can a Christian politician, columnist, or any other public figure be firm, truthful, yet also driven by love?
4. How do we remember the importance of public square involvement, yet at the same time, refrain from putting our trust there?
5. How can a church teach on public square involvement and issues without suggesting to those who may disagree, “We don’t want you here” or “You must change your positions before you are welcome here”?

6. Take some time to pray for those in public office, as well as for the public square ministry of mercy that takes place in and as a result of your own congregation. Make this a regular part of your prayer time.

7. After reading the conclusion to the book, what are some of the most important lessons you have learned?

APPENDIX TWO

Paul's Teaching On Good Works

What we find in Titus is a mini-Pauline theology or summation of what he teaches elsewhere regarding cross-wrought good works. Consider:

- We are not chosen, effectively called to God, justified, or saved based upon good works (Rom. 3:20, 27, 28; 4:1-25; 9:11, 32; 11:6; Gal. 2:16; 3:2; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9). Yet, good works play an important role.
- Good works demonstrate one has trusted Christ for salvation. This would include desiring God's glory and honor (as well as one's own glory in God's glory), along with immortality (Rom. 2:6-10). Since works either demonstrate the presence or absence of salvation, God will judge men by their works (2 Cor. 11:13; 2 Tim. 4:14) and the works of believers will be scrutinized in regard to different degrees of reward (1 Cor. 3:13-15).
- Good works involve obeying governmental authorities, provided they do not command us to do something contrary to the will of God and provided they are reasonably exercising their God-given purposes (Romans 13:1-4 [in light of Acts 5:29]).
- Paul clarifies that faith, hope, and love are part of the work to which God calls us (1 Thes. 1:3). Here "work", "labor," and "patience" are parallel. These also, in context, are part of the way the Thessalonians demonstrated the Spirit was working in them in response to the gospel (1 Thes. 1:4-5).²⁶²
- Good works involve obeying God as a result of the gospel applied to us (Rom. 1:1, 5, 16; 15:18).

- Paul speaks of the “work of Christ” which in context consists of ministering to the needs of the fellow believer and evangelizing in the process (Phil. 2:30).
- The ministry of Christian leaders (1 Thes. 5:13; 1 Tim. 3:1; 5:17: esp. word ministry) is part of the work that God brings about in some saints.
- Good works include helping those in need, especially fellow believers (2 Cor. 8-9, in light of 9:8).
- The fruit that is produced by the Spirit (and this is opposite the works of the flesh, so fruit=good works) includes: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal. 5:19-23). This means that good works are that which the Spirit produces in and through us—they include actions, affections, and motives. As such, the Spirit gives us both the will or desire and the ability to think and do the things that please God. Such “evil works” as we find in Gal. 5:19-21 are what characterizes the lost person who is alienated from God (Col. 1:21). This is why such gospel-wrought, Christ-won, God-glorifying good works glorify God—they not only show forth the change but also His character and wisdom (cf. Eph. 3:10).
- Paul wrote that love arises out of faith, Galatians 5:6, more specifically faith in the Son of God who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). As such, in light of Gal. 5:22-23, it is the Spirit of Christ who works in us to apply the presence of Christ that we might believe (faith is a gift of God, Eph. 2:9) in Christ and out of that faith that we should do those things which please God.

- Good works involve all that God calls us to do. All these works flow from the grace-giving saving work of Christ in us and the work of the Spirit (2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 2:20; 5:22-23; Col. 1:12-13) and bring glory to Him (Col. 1:10; 3:17).
- God sovereignly planned and prepared ahead of time that our grace-filled, Christ-bought salvation would bring about good works (Eph. 2:8-10).²⁶³ Such good works are so important to God He reveals through Paul those who are rich in this life should be rich in good works—including being generosity and sharing what one has (1 Tim. 6:18).
- Since standing strong in Christ against the devil is part of the good works to which we are saved (Eph. 2:8-10; 6:10-18) and since that standing strong also happens by the means of the armor of God, we also see that grace-fueled, Christ-bought, Spirit-empowered good works must also be engendered by the means of God's Word,²⁶⁴ growth in understanding and applying God's Word (especially the gospel),²⁶⁵ the practice of righteousness and honesty, prayer, and support of each other through prayer in the body of Christ.²⁶⁶
- The good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in also are to be helped along as leaders in the Church equip us for them through teaching the Word and training us (Eph. 4:7-16).
- Paul teaches in 2 Tim. 3:16-17 that we are equipped for good works through the God-breathed profitable Scriptures.
- The good works that flow from Christ's work in us are also helped along through prayer (Col. 1:9-13; 2 Thes. 2:16-17). This is especially important if we want to see fruit emerge from our works, namely outcomes that include changed lives and

the glorification of God (see also John 15:1-17). Additionally, holiness is important if our works are to be effective and blessed by God (2 Tim. 2:21-26).

- Our endurance in the work of the Lord is to be motivated by the certainty of our resurrection and the reward that comes along with it (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Tim. 6:17-18).²⁶⁷
- Our carrying out of Christ-bought, God-glorifying good works leads to increased knowledge of God and joy (Col. 1:10-11), which also proves to us the goodness of God's will (Rom. 12:2).

APPENDIX THREE²⁶⁸
A Grid For Preparing Christ-centered Sermons And Lessons

Preaching or teaching is expository exultation that seeks to make disciples *for the glory of God*. So, show forth the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ by preaching Jesus Christ crucified. Preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8).

Preaching or teaching must keep as its focus mindful, well-thought-out instruction of others for the purpose of God-glorifying discipling (1 Cor. 14:19 [see also Mt. 28:18-20]).

Regarding 1 Cor. 14:23-35: Here we learn what the purpose of preaching, teaching, and counseling should be: conviction of sin, calling people to account, disclosing the secrets of one's heart, and seeing one come to believe in and worship God.

- Some Things To Pray For The Sermon Or Lesson:
 - Worship God, examine self in regard to the subject and in regard to 2 Tim. 2:21. Lord, change me first!
 - Lord, glorify Your name through my preaching!
 - Lord, grant grace for me to create those who joyfully follow you to Your glory!
 - Lord, grant grace for me to preach for the joy of your people to the glory of your name (2 Cor. 1:24).
 - Admit that without Christ I can do nothing—especially bear fruit through my preaching.
 - Pray that God would work in hearts and carry out the divine purpose of the message.
 - Trust in Christ to work through me by means of a specific Bible promise.
 - Approach the sermon with confidence in Christ.
 - Thank God afterward for what he did.
 - I desire to write a God-honoring, Christ-focused, gospel-saturated biblically-sound sermon, which is bathed in prayer, which calls people to faith, and commitment, and which helps people to see the importance and application of the gospel to life.
 - Lord, you have taught us in your Word the following: “So shall My Word be which goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, with out accomplishing what I desire!” (Is. 55:11) Sovereign, all-powerful God, may this be my confidence as I preach your Word. Also, may I not trust in or focus only upon these techniques. I ask you to work through me to change hearts and lives! “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” Zech. 4:6
 - Lord, fill me with your Spirit! May the Word go forth with a demonstration of the Spirit and power. May I preach in the Spirit.
 - Lord, grant me to trust in you, your Spirit working through your Word, not in my creativity, etc.

- Lord, grant grace for me to preach with heart and passion.
- Pray after the sermon for the Lord to drive it home to people, to change their hearts, and grant them grace to apply it.
- Some Things To Ask About The Sermon Or Lesson:
 - Does the sermon or lesson display one big idea? Is it derived from the text?
 - Is there a holiday or calamitous event I should consider?
 - What topics should I look at in my indices?
 - How does the sermon promote Joy and Christian Hedonism? (Remember GOD IS GOSPEL!)
 - How does the sermon promote: Love for God? Prayer? Affections for God? How does it smash idolatry?
 - How does the sermon promote faith? What about holiness and godliness?
 - How does the sermon promote strong family, marriage, and parenting? Remember to use parenting applications!
 - How does the sermon rest in the gospel? The cross? How does the sermon show forth the gospel behind it?
 - How does the sermon prepare people for ministry?
 - How does the sermon prepare for and call people to leadership?
 - Does the sermon tie the topic into Biblical Theology?
 - How does the sermon help prepare people for their vocation?
 - Does the Introduction capture people's attention and make them want to pay attention? (Does it include things people value? Things that are unique? Things that threaten?)
 - Does the sermon call people to application? Transformation?
 - Does the sermon show people how our sovereign God is present and working!
 - Is the sermon sufficiently clear for whoever is present?
 - Does the sermon address both Christian and non-Christian?
 - Does the sermon: stir up holy affections? Enlighten the mind? Saturate with Scripture? Emplify analogies and images? Use Threat and Warning? Call listeners to a greater affection? Display brokenness and tenderheartedness? Display intensity (acting as if what I speak of is real)?
 - Saturday nights and Wednesdays (fasting): Bathe in prayer and in preaching food.
 - What should I address about the cure of souls?
 - Have I remembered Proverbs 12:18? "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

APPENDIX FOUR

Corporate Worship In Step With The Gospel

Few things have more impact upon a congregation's view of the Christian life than their public assemblies. Though we have addressed the importance of preaching in step with the gospel, we have said nothing about other aspects of corporate worship. There are a number of reasons why all aspects of such gatherings should be directed by the good news of Jesus Christ and have the gospel at its center.

- All true Christian worship is driven by the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ongoing priestly work of Jesus Christ, since we experience God's forgiveness and love only in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:39; Ephesians 1:7); we have access to God the Father only in and through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-22; Hebrews 4:16); we cannot please God apart from Jesus Christ (Romans 8:8); and the New Testament itself grounds worship in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:1-2).
- If we explicitly or implicitly worship God in a manner that suggests anyone can approach him, worship him, or be accepted by him apart from Jesus Christ, we not only are diminishing the reality of our own sin (Romans 1:18-23; 3:23), we also are not worshipping God in both spirit and truth (John 4:24). The main reason is that we would be worshipping a false god, one who is not absolutely holy, one who can be approached apart from Christ-accomplished redemption.
- Related to the previous point, without an emphasis upon the cross, it becomes far easier for a person to worship the experience of worship, since they do not have to focus upon the fact they are sinners saved by grace, which is the only reason they can rightly worship God (Eph. 2:11-22). What is more, such cross-less worship may lead people to think that they are fine apart from trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. After all, many people enjoy thinking about great and beautiful things, yet have no interest in or understanding about true salvation.
- Jesus Christ himself was very serious about gospel-directed worship since he instituted the Lord's Supper which is, in one sense, the first Christ-centered "systematic theology book". A quick look at Matthew 26 and 1 Cor. 11 reminds us that we are sinners since it speaks of forgiveness of sinners (Mt. 26:28), a forgiveness that comes only through the giving of Jesus' body in sacrificial death (Mt. 26:26, 28); it points to the Christ-accomplished resurrection since Jesus says this was the last time he would drink of the vine's fruit until the consummated kingdom (Mt. 26:29); it makes it clear that the application of the saving work of Jesus Christ to sinners brings eternal life and their inclusion in the future consummated kingdom (Mt. 26:29); it reminds us that the death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus ratified the new covenant God has promised through the Old Testament prophets by which he would change his people from the inside out through his permanently indwelling Spirit enabling them to live out God's will more effectively than under the old covenant (Mt. 26:28 [Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27]); it reminds us that through Christ we are not only transformed people, but we live as part of the kingdom of God—under his rule (Mt. 26:29); it reminds us of the importance of remembering God's works and worshiping him in light of the gospel (1 Cor. 11:26); it helps explain the gospel (1 Cor. 11:26); it encourages people to think about where they stand with God (1 Cor. 11:28); and it reminds us we are united together in one body and thus should be unified since we are in one Savior (1 Cor. 10:17). Simply-put, the Lord's Supper helps us keep the gospel and its ramifications central. This, along with its many different facets, is why the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently, not infrequently.

- Historically, Christian worship has understood this gospel-centeredness of its corporate worship. "The liturgies of the church through the ages and the consistent message of Scripture combine to reveal a pattern for corporate worship that is both historical and helpful for our time. Christian worship is a 're-presentation' of the gospel. By our worship we extol, embrace, and share the progress of the story of the gospel in our lives."²⁶⁹ Whether we are more of a high church or low church in our "flavor," no worship service should assume the gospel. This means that in the selection of music the question is asked, "Are we making sure that those present understand and remember we can worship God truly only as saved individuals who are coming to God in, through, and because of the cross?" Certainly not every music selection needs to mention Christ or the cross, but it should be clear in any assembly of believers the gospel is necessarily at the center of Christian worship.

In addition to the sermon, music, and Scripture readings that emphasize the Christ-centeredness of corporate worship, simple gospel-focused transitions can help. For example, if a music selection focuses upon the love of God, yet does not tie that love into the cross of Jesus Christ, the congregation can be given this kind of introduction: "We are taught in Romans 8:38-39 that God's love comes to us through Jesus Christ. Let's praise God for his love we have in the cross!"

Finally, a look at the entire worship service order will help, especially if we ask the question, "Is it clear to those present that the gospel directs our worship?"

ENDNOTES

¹ Douglas Moo, "Justification In Galatians," in Andreas J. Kostenberger, Robert W. Yarbrough, ed's., *Understanding The Times: New Testament Studies In The 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 178-79, writes: "The 'Gentile problem' in Galatians is not whether Gentiles should be included in the people of God. The issue is, rather, on what grounds they are included in the people of God. For the agitators, belonging to God's people and thereby enjoying God's eschatological vindication could come only by identifying with Abraham's descendants by the Old Testament-mandated and time-honored means of circumcision and torah piety.... Paul and the agitators did not disagree, apparently, about the importance of faith. What they disagreed about was whether faith was to be followed by torah obedience; or, more precisely (and very importantly), whether torah obedience had to be added to faith for the purpose of securing one's relationship to God and his people."

² I believe Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is The Mission Of The Church? Making Sense Of Social Justice, Shalom, and The Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 91-113, are correct when they explain that the New Testament speaks of the gospel in a narrow and a wide way. The narrow way is how I have defined it here. The wider way to speak of the gospel encompasses the broader impact that will be felt among the saved, transformed people of God and throughout the creation as a result of God's redemption. Since, as they explain, the narrower use of the gospel is the doorway into the broader, that is how I am using the word gospel throughout this book. Yet, I will also show throughout this book that there are broader good news ramifications ("gospel of the kingdom") which arise from this basic good news or "gospel of the cross," (terms used by DeYoung and Gilbert).

³ *Orthopodēō*.

⁴ "The Gospel Of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration" (Glendale Heights, Il.: The Committee On Evangelical Unity In The Gospel, 1999), Preamble. It is available at www.seekgod.ca/ec.htm.

⁵ Tim Keller, "The Centrality Of The Gospel," a position paper for Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, available at: www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/centrality.pdf.

⁶ Jerry Bridges, "Gospel-Driven Sanctification," *Modern Reformation*, 12, 3 (May/June). Accessed on-line at modernreformation.org.

⁷ Keller, "The Centrality," 1-2.

⁸ John Piper, "God Strengthens Us By The Gospel." A sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota on November 26, 2006. Available at desiringgod.org.

⁹ D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross And Resurrection Of Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 39. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline Of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 46, similarly calls it the "heart of the gospel".

¹⁰ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, Vol. 4 (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1953-2001), en loc.

¹¹ Ray Van Neste, "The Message Of Titus: An Overview," *The Southern Baptist Journal Of Theology*, 7, 3 (Fall 2003): 18.

¹² Van Neste, "The Message Of Titus:" 18.

¹³ This outline is adapted from Van Neste, "The Message Of Titus:" 19.

¹⁴ In Acts 28:28 Luke uses the term to record what Paul said to some who visited him when he was under house arrest in Rome: “Therefore, let it be known to you that unto the Gentiles this salvation from God was sent; they will listen.” (author’s own translation) In the context of Acts 28:28 this salvation includes what Jesus Christ has accomplished to bring about the kingdom of God and to save people from their sins, figuratively to heal their spiritual diseases (cf. Acts 28:23, 27, 31).

¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, “Brother, Are You Saved?” *Modern Reformation* (Mar/Apr. 1996). In that same issue Michael Horton, “Saved From God By God,” wrote: “God saved us from himself in order to save us for himself forever. Praise be to the Lamb!”

¹⁶ Sanctification is the work of God’s grace whereby we are transformed to become like God (Eph. 4:22-24), more specifically like Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), and enabled to say, “Yes,” to God and “No” to sin (Rom. 6:1-11; 8:1-17; Col. 3:1-25). Perseverance is the gracious work of God in us whereby he keeps us in the faith and enables us to live in the very way he requires for eternal life (John 10:27-30; Rom. 2:6-10; 8:31-39; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 2:1-4; 5:11-6:12; Jude 24-25).

¹⁷ In May 1734 Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon geared toward youth in which he made the following conclusion after preaching on these two verses and seeking to demonstrate there is far more and better pleasure to be found in God than in the ways of the world: “By this teaching one of the greatest objections that youth have against true faith in God is demolished. One of the main things that prevents youth from embracing true faith in God is their pursuit of pleasure. Their goal is to spend their youth years in pleasure and they believe that this will be lost if they trust in God and follow his way. They look upon the biblical way of life as dull, boring, and depressing. So, if they follow Christ, they must give up on pleasure. Yet, what I have just taught shows just how false these notions are and that the reality is this: True faith in God, rather than removing pleasure, will be the most direct way to find it! In fact, it is the only way to find true pleasure. The pleasure found in any other way of living cannot be compared to the pleasure found in God.” (Taken from *The Works Of Jonathan Edwards Online*, at Edwards.yale.edu. This is a paraphrase of the actual quote)

¹⁸ Ray Van Neste in the *ESV Study Bible* note for Titus 3:5.

¹⁹ Both the Philo and Josephus references are from J. Guhr, “*Paliggenesia*,” in *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), vol. 1: 185.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 184.

²¹ We must understand that these others resources or means of grace are all purchased for us through Christ (John 16:5-15; Acts 20:28; Eph. 6:10-18; Heb. 4:16). So, they are not resources added to Christ as if he were not sufficient. They are means of grace Christ has wrought for us, by which we can be transformed.

²² This is how the verb is used in Hebrews 11:24.

²³ W. Gunther, “*Sebomai*,” *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), vol. 2: 91. Hereafter this work will be referred to DNTT.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 93.

²⁵ Gunther goes on to say (93-94) that apart from four instances in Acts, all occurrences of *eusebia* (godliness) and related forms (verb, adjective, adverb) are confined to the later Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy, Titus) and 2 Peter—most likely because early on the Church used these terms to describe non-Christian piety.

²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of a false godliness and the preceding context describes the kind of person who is pretending godliness. The converse situation, when one is truly godly, would produce the opposite characteristics.

²⁷ We must not miss the reality that godliness is not prized in the world. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:12: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

²⁸ J. Ligon Duncan III, “Biblical Godliness: 1 Timothy 6:11,” a sermon preached at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi, on December 31, 2006 and available at their web site.

²⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice Of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987), 17-18.

³⁰ William Law, *A Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), page 1 (cited in Bridges, *The Practice Of Godliness* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987], 19).

³¹ *Kosmikos*.

³² Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Fredrick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature* (University Of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, 2nd ed.), 445. Hereafter this lexicon will be referenced simply as BAGD.

³³ C. J. Mahaney, ed. *Worldliness: Resisting The Seduction Of A Fallen World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 27.

³⁴ Therefore, when a person united to Christ and indwelt by the Spirit does dwell on such desires and/or does give into them, grief and repentance are the result.

³⁵ This fits with what the Old Testament had prophesied about the coming heart-transforming New Covenant (Ezek. 36:26-27).

³⁶ S. Wibbing, “*Sophrosune*,” DNTT, 1: 501.

³⁷ In Acts 26:25 Luke reports that Paul told Festus of himself that he was speaking words of truth and rationality (*sōphrosynē*), rather than being out of his mind (26:24). In 1 Timothy 2:9, within a context of exhorting women to be modest in their dress, as well as to have faith, love, and holiness, Paul uses the noun *sōphrosynē* to speak of self-control, i.e. living within moral boundaries, rather than out-of-control and in just any sinful way. In Romans 12:3, when Paul writes, “not to think of yourself beyond what is necessary, but to think unto the end that you might think soberly (the verb *sōphroneō* [author’s translation]), he calls saints to a sober assessment of their gifts which involves a recognition of a “measure of faith,” that is, knowing to what extent one has the faith suited for exercising particular gifts, rather than thinking about themselves beyond what they ought.

³⁸ C. J. Mahaney, “God, My Heart, And Clothes,” in C. J. Mahaney, ed. *Worldliness: Resisting The Seduction Of A Fallen World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 120, writing on 1 Timothy 2:9.

³⁹ *Dikaiōs*.

⁴⁰ *Dikaiosynē*.

⁴¹ That the New Testament sets forth two ages (this present age and the age-to-come) is seen in Eph. 1:21; 2:2, 7. That we are without sin in the age-to-come is seen in Rom. 8:29-30; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21:27.

⁴² C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning And Evening Devotions*, October 12, morning reading.

⁴³ It is very difficult to know how the participle, *prosdechomenoi* (translated in the ESV as “waiting”), functions in relation to what precedes it. Does it introduce the manner in which we live out the transformed

life (so Ray Van Neste in the *ESV Study Bible*), does it show what we are doing while in the present age (so J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in the *Harper's New Testament Commentaries*), or does it merely add another description to what transformation takes place (William Hendriksen, *Baker New Testament Commentary*)? As we will argue below, Paul's use of "hope" elsewhere supports the third view.

⁴⁴ The case of a noun, which is signified by the ending on the word, denotes what relationship it has in the sentence. For example, this could be the subject, the object that receives the action of a verb, the instrument by which something is done, or the location or sphere in which something is done. Number refers to whether something is singular (ball) or plural (balls). A direct object is a noun that receives the action of a verb. In the sentence, "He threw the ball," ball is the direct object.

⁴⁵ The late 18th to early 19th century pastor Thomas Chalmers put forth the following insight regarding how we fight sin and, as a result, touches upon what Paul is getting at. Chalmers preached (in updated language): "There are two ways in which anyone interested in being moral at all can attempt to rid their heart of a love for the world (or that which is immoral). First, they can try to focus upon the empty and/or destructive nature of such immorality with the purpose that the heart will be moved away from desiring such objects or actions. The other option is to look at another greater object, such as God, and to realize that the second object with its way of life, is far better. In other words, in this second approach a person replaces an old affection with a newer and better affection. My purpose in this sermon is to show that in light of how God has made us, the first approach will not work. Only the second approach is sufficient for turning the heart's affection away from that which wrong and which dominates it." (From the sermon "The Expulsive Power Of A New Affection," based on 1 John 2:15)

Chalmers captures an important part of being directed by the good news. This involves seeing how glorious and so much better is the pleasure God has for us, which has the power to increase godly affections and to root out ungodly affections.

⁴⁶ In Greek, like with many other languages, what case a noun or participle appears in (denoted by the ending on the word) shows what function it has in the sentence.

⁴⁷ Thayer's Lexicon, en loc., found on blueletter.org.

⁴⁸ Simon J. Gathercole, in the *ESV Study Bible* (on Galatians 6:14), 2256.

⁴⁹ What we find is that there are three primary reasons why Paul moves into the focused discussion of the saving work of Jesus Christ, the gospel, in 2:14. First and foremost, Paul has argued that the saving work of Jesus Christ stands behind the hope we have (13) and so he wants to explain how that is so. What we find in verse 14 is that there is a direct connection between the cross and the kind of transformed life necessary to receive God's reward of eternal salvation (Rom. 2:6-10; 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-23), which means the only way we can have the kind of certainty of which Paul writes in verse 13 is to receive and rest upon Christ and his saving work alone for salvation and, as a result, to see the transforming work of the Spirit in us, which becomes our earnest payment or guarantee that God will complete our salvation (Eph. 1:13-14; Phil. 1:6).

Second, we have learned in Titus 2:11-13 that the glory of the gospel is that we get Jesus Christ, we will see him and someday be with him. What stands at the heart of his glory, how he shows forth the weight and magnificence of God (2 Cor. 4:6)? It is the cross. What would be more fitting for Paul, then, than to explain how the cross brings forth such a God-glorifying outcome?

Finally, Paul clarifies that the certainty of the future glorious appearing of our great God and Savior should not lead us to neglect this present world. Rather, we are to be a people who are eager to carry out those things that are pleasing to God. This flows directly from the gospel.

⁵⁰ This text is citing Psalm 32:1.

⁵¹ BAGD, 631.

⁵² This is the only time Paul uses this verb, *lutroō*. He does not use its related noun (*lutron*) at all and only once does he use the related verb (*luō*) in a salvation context. In Ephesians 2:14 it speaks of breaking down the dividing wall of hostility between believing Jew and Gentile.

⁵³ See Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters* (EP, 2008).

⁵⁴ The mission of Israel in the Old Testament was “‘come and see’ not ‘go and tell.’” Kevin DeYoung, Greg Gilbert, *What Is The Mission Of The Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 36.

⁵⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, 174.

⁵⁶ We also dare not miss the reality that Paul is applying to the New Testament Church language used in the Old Testament of Israel, a common New Testament practice. The apple of God’s eye, his special people, the community he has called out of the world to glorify him is now the New Testament Church, those united to Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile.

⁵⁷ As we see in 1 Timothy and 1 John, it is also the case that false teaching can blunt this zeal for good works. A heresy which has cycled through the Church for 2,000 years is that it really doesn’t matter how you live. In fact, a form of it which has been popular over the past generation is that “works” is a bad term, something we should not even discuss beyond denouncing we are not saved by works (and implied is that works have no importance!). Underneath such teaching this fire for good works Christ ignites within us can be all but extinguished. Yet, true believers will respond to gospel-grounded teaching to correct the error.

⁵⁸ Earlier in Titus Paul taught one’s works demonstrate where they stand with God. Specifically, he wrote those who do evil works are unfit (tested and found wanting) for every good work (1:16).

⁵⁹ Two other places “good works” for Paul deal with helping meet physical needs, i.e. to engage in the ministry of mercy, are 1 Timothy 5:10 and 1 Timothy 6:18.

⁶⁰ This scenario is taken from Mike Emlet, “No More Bible Band-aids,” *Westminster Today*, 4, 1 (Summer 2011): 14.

⁶¹ Though in recent years scholars have been right to advocate that the Pharisees did not deny God’s grace altogether, there is still ample evidence their main bent was away from the direction of thinking they truly needed a Savior and Lord: Matthew 23:1-36.

⁶² Emlet, ‘Band-aids,’ 15. For access to a more in-depth treatment of this subject by Mike Emlet, see his three part series, “No More Bible Band-aids,” available at www.goo.gl/phA39. I would also add that the glorious good news of Jesus Christ moves us toward the understanding that in Christ we have far better and more lasting pleasures and rewards than what is offered in this world or in the fleeting pleasures of sin (cf. Mt. 6:19-21; Heb. 11:24-26). As Pastor Thomas Chalmers challenged in his sermon, “The Expulsive Power Of A New Affection,” such a focus is far more effective in moving us toward godliness and away from the world than merely focusing upon laws or the dangers of sin.

⁶³ John 1:14, author’s own translation.

⁶⁴ Burk Parsons, “The Christ Of The Old And New,” *TableTalk*, 35, 4 (April 2011): 2. Parsons goes on to explain: “While the words ‘concealed’ and ‘revealed’ do not entirely accurately describe the relationship between the testaments, they do help us grasp the fundamental truth that the New Testament is found in seed form throughout the pages of the Old Testament and that the Old Testament blossoms forth as a flower in the New Testament.”

⁶⁵ See Mt. 4:23; Mk. 1:1, 14-15; Jn. 16:15; 20:31; Acts 1:1-8; 13:23; 14:15; 16:10, 31; 17:2-3, 30-31; 19:17-18; 28:31; Rm. 1:1-2, 9-17; 1:18-11:36; 1 Cor. 1:17-2:5; 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4; Gal. 1:6-10; 3:1-4:31; Eph.

1:3-6; Phil. 1:5, 12, 21-30; 2:1-11, 22; 3:1-21; 4:13, 19; Col. 2:6-3:17; 1 Tim. 1:11; Titus 2:1-15; 3:1-8; Heb. 1:1-14; 2:1-4; 3:1-10:39; 11:24-26; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3-12; 3:18; 2 Peter 1:1, 3-4; 3:18; 1 Jn. 1:7; 2:1-2; Jude 3; Rev. 1:1-2, 5-6; 2:8; 5:1-14; 20:4, et al.

⁶⁶ The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* defines God's works of providence as, "his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions."

⁶⁷ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church And The Surprising Offense Of God's Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 99-100.

⁶⁸ That God most loves his own glory is seen in the fact that he has formed his people for his own glory (Is. 43:7, 21), he saved his people for his own glory (Josh. 4:23-24; Ps. 106:8), he restrains and defers his anger for his own glory (Is. 48:9-11), he exercises his anger and judgment for his glory (Ez. 6:7, 14; 20:22, 26, 38), he restores his people for his own glory (Ez. 20:42, 44), and he answers prayer for his glory (Ps. 50:15).

⁶⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester and Grand Rapids: IVP and Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 201.

⁷⁰ Leeman, *The Church*, 100.

⁷¹ This is also seen in Malachi 1:6-14 where the point is made negatively, namely that honor for God was lacking because of Judah's lack of obedience.

⁷² John Piper, *A Baptist Catechism* (Desiring God), question and answer #16. This catechism is a reworking of *The Baptist Catechism* (sometimes called Keach's Catechism), itself a Baptist version of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

⁷³ Piper, *A Baptist Catechism*, 17.

⁷⁴ Piper, *A Baptist Catechism*, #18. That sin consists of not honoring God is seen clearly in Mal. 1:6-14.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "God Makes Men Sensible Of Their Misery Before He Reveals His Mercy And Love," in *Jonathan Edwards On Knowing Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1990), 50.

⁷⁶ This is a wisdom psalm and as is often the case with wisdom literature, God's covenant law stands behind the teaching. Part of the curse of the law for not obeying God in faith is: "And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it" (Lev. 26:16); "and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit" (Lev. 26:20); "cursed shall be the fruit of your womb" (Dt. 28:18); "the LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies" (Dt. 28:25); "you shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little...you shall plant vineyards...but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes...you shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity" (Dt. 28:38-41). At the same time, God's blessing for obeying him in faith is fruitfulness (Lev. 26:3-13; Dt. 8:7-10; Joshua 1:7-8). So, throughout the Old Testament there is awareness that God's providence stands behind all man's actions (Ps. 103:19; Prov. 16:1, 9; 19:21; Dan. 4:35), which includes the outward successes and failures of men (Ps. 75:6-7). Truly, man is helpless left to himself and in desperate need of God.

⁷⁷ This term refers to a narrative about other narratives, i.e. the overarching account of what God is doing in history, an account that gives cohesion to all the various historical accounts, books, commands, psalms, and letters in the Bible.

⁷⁸ Man's necessary dependence on God not only is seen in the metanarrative of the entire Old Testament, but it also comes through in the message and structure of individual books. Let me give a few examples. In

Genesis mankind continually spirals downward morally in the pre-patriarchal days (6:5; 9:20-25; 11:1-9), which sets the stage for God's advantage-giving covenant with Abraham (12:1-3; 15:12-21; 17:1-14; 22:17-18). Yet, even with all the privileges given to the burgeoning nation of Israel, the patriarchs continued to miss God's mark and stood in constant need of his forgiveness and of his working out his plan among them (Gen. 50:20 is a good summary statement).

The entire book of Exodus reveals how God saved Israel out of bondage (1:1-15:21) and, as a result of this gracious blood-bought act (12:1-32), showed them how to live before him in faith-fueled-obedience (15:22-24:18), as well as how to approach him rightly through atonement (25:1-40:38). As a result, the entire exodus from Egypt became a type of all future deliverance of God's people by God (e.g. Mic. 7:15-19), not least of which is his ultimate work of redemption that the exodus pointed to—the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and on-going priestly work of Jesus Christ (Lk. 9:31).

It has long been recognized that the book of Deuteronomy is structured similar to 14th-15th century treaties of the Ancient Near East whereby the king of a strong nation would covenant with a lesser nation to be their king, to take care of them, and to protect them. Based upon this benevolence toward the lesser nation, the latter would be given directives for how to live in submission to the king. By this very structure, then, Deuteronomy makes the point that because God is the Savior of his people and their king, they are to live in dependence upon him, to love and serve him, and to obey him (e.g. Dt. 10:12-13).

This gospel pattern is not confined to the first five books of the Old Testament. We also see it in the Prophets. For example, in Isaiah the prophet calls Judah toward the end of the 8th century to trust in the LORD, not self, as they face external enemies. He does this by chastising them for outward displays of religion that are without true faith-fueled obedience (ch. 1); calling them to trust in God as opposed to man (ch's. 2-5), especially during the opposition from Israel and Syria (7-11); displaying God's universal sovereignty, righteousness, and justice in his dealing with the nations—all designed to dissuade Judah from trusting in other nations for security (ch's. 13-23); prophesying God's future universal reign over all peoples, which should lead to present trust (ch's. 24-27); discouraging them from trusting in any of their enemies who will be defeated (ch's. 28-35); and by motivating Hezekiah to trust in the LORD in the face of impending Assyrian threats (ch's. 36-39). In the latter section of the work (ch's. 40-66), we discover that the future destiny, the salvation, of the servants of God (ch's. 56-66) depend upon God's restoration of his people (40:1-52:12) that will take place ultimately through a suffering servant, the clearest prophesy of the atoning death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament (52:13-53:12).

Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, fashions his work to the increasingly unjust Judah and Israel around three cycles of messages, each cycle ending on a note of future restoration. The central message of the book is summarized in 6:1-8: God's gracious redemption of his people should lead to faith-fueled obedience to him, an obedience that displays itself in social reform and justice.

This gospel pattern of dependence upon God that we find in the Law and the Prophets is not absent in the more general Writings section of the Old Testament either. In a collection of sayings and material that is designed to provide the treasure of skill for godly living from the mouth of God himself (Prov. 1:1-7; 2:1-6), the book of Proverbs puts on center stage the role that reverential trust in God plays (Prov. 3:5-8): "Trust in the LORD will all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.... Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil."

⁷⁹ Trust in God is driven in the Old Testament by many motivations. Consider just a few. At the top of the list is the glory of God. God is glorified when he supplies grace for what he commands (Ps. 86:8-9; Is. 46:13). We also trust God based upon the wisdom of his Word that leads, watches over, talks with, and shows us the way (Prov. 6:22-23, in light of 2:6). The LORD also has promised to be a strong defense for those who trust in him (Pss. 9:9-10; 62:5-8; 118:5-8; Prov. 18:10). Additionally, the faint, weary, exhausted, weak saint will be given power, strength, and renewed vigor (Is. 40:28-31). God promises present and future grace (his rich blessing) based upon his past grace and his attributes (Ps. 84:12; Is. 46:9-13). More specifically, God has promised to withhold from his people no good thing they truly need (Ps. 84:11), not the least of which is his unceasing steadfast love and acts of mercy, the outworking of his faithfulness, his goodness (Lam. 3:21-25), and ultimately throughout all eternity fullness of joy and pleasure (Ps. 16:11)! And we know we can trust in all his promises since he is watching over his word to perform it (Jer. 1:12).

⁸⁰ Asaph was a chief musician, singer, and percussionist appointed by David (1 Chron. 15:19; 16:9).

⁸¹ Calvin, *Psalms*, en loc.

⁸² Calvin, *Psalms*, en loc. This affirmation of desire and satisfaction in God as the ultimate pleasure and treasure is also affirmed by Paul in Philippians 1:21-23: "For to me to live is Christ, and **to die is gain**. **22**If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. **23**I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and **be with Christ**, for that is **far better**. (emphasis added)

⁸³ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, vol. 5 in Frank Gaebelin, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zonservan, 1991), 483.

⁸⁴ In Psalm 119:67, 71 read: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." Implied is that God has taught the psalmist to keep his Word through affliction. As such, it is another example from the Old Testament of God empowering believers toward the end of keeping his Word.

⁸⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, cited in James Pruch, in his June 20, 2011 post on the blog "Beneath The Cross: At The Intersection Of Theology And Everyday Life." This post was accessed on August 23, 2011 at jamespruch.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/charles-spurgeon-on-preaching-christ-from-the-whole-bible.

⁸⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God In Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 13.

⁸⁷ See Martin Luther's comments recorded in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life Of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), 49-50. See also the comments in *The Reformation Study Bible* (Lake Mary, Florida: Ligonier, 2005), 1611.

⁸⁸ Many Bible scholars speak of God's declarations (i.e. his indicatives) standing underneath his commands (i.e. his imperatives). In other words, the statement of what God has done and is doing in us makes possible the carrying out of his commands.

⁸⁹ This emphasis upon the centrality of the gospel also permeates the rest of the New Testament. Elsewhere Paul affirms that the gospel is so important that anyone who changes it should be accursed (Gal. 1:6-10), for it is only through the proclamation of the gospel and trust in Jesus Christ that one is declared righteous by God, saved from the law's curse, and made a recipient of God's promises (Gal. 1:1-4:31). What is more, it is this same gospel that enables a person to be changed and to please God through true Spirit-empowered, biblical ethics (Gal. 5:1-6:18). This life-saving, transforming message Paul proclaims and with which he has been entrusted is "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:11).

In Matthew we are told that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom (4:23), a message that tells those who are poor in spirit and thus part of the kingdom of God (5:3) they are a light who glorifies God (5:14-16) and that the person who is part of the kingdom and lives such a way is the one who comes to and trusts in the Father and the Son (7:7-10; 8:10; 11:28-30) by the grace of God (11:25-27). Such change only happens through the saving work of the Son (20:28) and the resulting continual work of the Holy Spirit (7:11, compare with Lk. 11:13). This glorious good news is also a fulfillment of the metanarrative of the Old Testament, more specifically, that to which the Law pointed (2:13; 5:17). Mark labels his description of the life of Jesus Christ as "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1:1) and then clarifies that the necessary response for those who would be part of the kingdom is repentance and belief in the gospel (1:14-15)—resulting in change at the heart level (7:14-23), and made possible through the saving work of Jesus Christ (10:45; 11:22-25).

Luke labels the birth of Jesus that was heralded by an angel to shepherds "good news of great joy" (2:10), a God-glorifying (2:14) gospel that fulfills the promise of a long-awaited Savior and Messiah by God's Old Testament people (1:26-28, 46-55; 2:22-38). Salvation is applied to those who repent (13:3) and trust in Jesus as Savior and thus acknowledge him before men (12:8-12). Those who trust the Son are given the

Spirit who brings to them all the Father's gifts (11:13). Luke also clarifies that this amazing grace through Jesus Christ was that to which the metanarrative of the Old Testament pointed (24:27).

In Luke's sequel to his Gospel, the book of Acts (cf. 1:1-3), we discover that through the completed work of Jesus Christ the promised new covenant alluded to in the old (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32) has come through the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God (2:1-13, 17-24). Such change clearly comes as people trust in Jesus Christ as Savior in response to the proclamation of his death, burial, and resurrection, and as divinely empowered to do so (2:23-24; 8:26-43; 10:34-43; 13:13-49; 16:14, 31; 17:30-31; 26:12-29; 28:23), a means of salvation to which the Old Testament prophets clearly pointed (10:43).

This same God-glorifying, people-saving, life-transforming, Christ-accomplished, Spirit-applied work permeates the writings of John (Jn. 1:14-18, 29; 3:1-36; 6:35-51; 7:37-39; 10:15-18, 27-30; 11:25-26; 14:6, 15-17; 20:31; 1 Jn. 1:7; 2:1-2; 4:10; Rev. 5:9-10; 12:11); Peter (1 Peter 1:1-2:12; 2 Peter 2:1-11); Jude (vv. 24-25); and also the book of Hebrews.

There is too much material in Hebrews that proves our point to try and cite it all. Special attention, however, should be given to chapters 7-11.

⁹⁰ Authors shaped by Hebrew culture often used a device known today as an *inclusio*, in which a piece of literature began and ended with the same words, subject, or theme. As a result, the readers were cued into what the piece was about, namely whatever the beginning and ending subject was.

⁹¹ Mark A. Seifrid, *Romans in New Testament Use*, Carson, Beale, ed's., 678.

⁹² Taken from an October 26, 2010 blog post.

⁹³ "Wisdom of speech" simply is a technical term that would have been widely recognized in that day and time among Greco-Romans as referring to "the rhetoric of learned scholars...the wit and eloquence that neatly packaged more than one school of thought in first-century Greece." (D. A. Carson, *The Cross And Christian Ministry* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, repr.], 13). Paul wanted people to focus upon Jesus Christ and his work, not the messenger!

Bill Kynes, "Christian Leadership And A Crucified Messiah In Paul's Letter To The Corinthians," a paper presented at the 2002 Evangelical Free Church Of America Ministerial Association Midwinter Theological Discussion, 1, wrote: "As early as the fifth century B.C. the Greek historian Herodotus had said, 'All Greeks were zealous for every kind of wisdom.' Apparently that tradition endured, for in the time of Paul there were those who made a living satisfying that popular passion. The Sophists, the professional purveyors of *sophia* [wisdom]. These traveling teachers went from city to city giving paid lectures, speaking on the art of wisdom. This wisdom would equip the listeners with the skills needed to get on in the world and to be successful. The Sophists were especially noted for their rhetorical abilities, through which they entertained large crowds. Some enjoyed great success in telling others how to succeed, and the best of them amassed large fortunes. They set the standard of wisdom in much of the Mediterranean world, and apparently, in the city of Corinth, for Paul's words in 1:18-2:5 seem to have a Sophist's understanding of wisdom very much in view."

⁹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979, repr.), 41.

⁹⁵ "The Gospel Of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration" (Glendale Heights, IL: The Committee On Evangelical Unity In The Gospel, 1999), Affirmations And Denials, #18. It is available at www.seekgod.ca/ec.htm.

⁹⁶ John Owen, *Apostasy From The Gospel*, Abridged by R. J. K. Law (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner Of Truth Trust, 2003, repr.), 75.

⁹⁷ I was reminded of this truth by Mark Dever in a series of sermons on evangelism delivered at the Desiring God pastor's conference in 2009, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

⁹⁸ Stiles, *Marks*, 37-42, tells the true story of how the gospel was assumed with the Kevin Roose, a Brown University student who attended Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va, pretending to be a saved evangelical student. His purpose was to write a book about evangelical Christianity from first-hand experience. Though Roose learned how to say and do some of the things Christians say and do, no one during his semester asked him about Christ or took him to the gospel. The gospel was assumed. The reality here is that Liberty is not alone. More Churches and Christian schools, as well as Christian individuals would operate this way than not. This must change!

⁹⁹ Stiles, *Marks*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Stiles, *Marks*, 40.

¹⁰¹ James Denney, quoted in James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York, 1946), 74. (Cited by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. in his blog, "Christ Is Deeper Still," 5/19/10)

¹⁰² I define God's wisdom this way because the following context demands it.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Edwards, "God Glorified In Man's Dependence," in *Jonathan Edwards On Knowing Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1990), 33.

¹⁰⁴ Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., "The Power Of The Gospel In The Church Today," *Trinity Journal*, 18, 1 (1997): 4. Carson, *The Cross*, 33, adds: "It has been persuasively argued that Paul is alluding to the sophists of his day. Many intellectual movements greatly prized rhetoric. Philosophers were widely praised for their oratory as for their content. But the sophists brought these ideals to new heights." Carson (34) continues: "It is difficult for us at the end of the twentieth century [or in the twenty-first] to appreciate how influential this allegiance to rhetoric was. There is at least a little hint in the fact that Paul finds it necessary to deal with the matter again in 2 Corinthians (see 10:9-10; 11:5-6). It is worth remembering that rhetoric was a central subject in most Western universities until the beginning of this century."

¹⁰⁵ This is an important aspect of being directed by the good news. Such lack of enslavement to how one comes across to others or what others think about them, truly does free up a person to love boldly, courageously, and to speak firm truth, even when it may not always be accepted.

¹⁰⁶ "The aim of evangeli[stic] truths is to get the eyes of men off themselves and their own righteousness for present peace and future glory, and on to Christ and his righteousness." John Owen, *Apostasy From The Gospel*, Abridged by R. J. K. Law (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner Of Truth Trust, 2003, repr.), 54.

¹⁰⁷ Again, I am not suggesting that illustrations and analogies, along with technology and organization cannot be utilized in behalf of faithful, Christ-focused, God-exalting, Spirit-empowered, gospel-driven evangelism. They can. However, the focus of such methods must be to be subservient to making the unadulterated gospel clear (See Mt. 13:52; 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:13-25; 2 Tim. 2:24-26, all of which emphasize the importance of teaching, of making the gospel clear), rather than taking center stage themselves as the focus of trust.

¹⁰⁸ This is a paraphrase from one of Mark Dever's sermons at the Desiring God pastors' conference in Minneapolis in 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Carson, *The Cross*, 46. See also Col. 1:28 where Paul writes his purpose is to present as many men as he can mature in Christ.

¹¹⁰ Literally, in 13a Paul writes, "We speak these things". This is the same kind of terminology he uses in verses 6-7 to write of speaking wisdom. As a result, we know "these things" comprise the "secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (2:7). "These things," then, refer

to the gospel that is the means whereby God saves and brings us to glory, i.e. “Christ crucified...the power and wisdom of God” (1:23-24).

¹¹¹ Though the term translated “interpreting” is used only one other time in the New Testament, where it means “compare with” (2 Cor. 10:12), it is clear in this context it has the meaning often associated with it in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, namely “interpreting” or “explaining”. This term is found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament at Gen. 40:8, 16, 22; 41:12, 13, 15; Dan. 5:7.

¹¹² Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 72.

¹¹³ Acts 28:18 (Luke’s record of what Paul says); 1 Cor. 4:3, 4; 9:3; 10:25, 27; 14:24.

¹¹⁴ Though verse 15 is a difficult verse to understand in isolation, if it is seen in context, its meaning is clear. The verb translated “judge” is the same verb we saw at the end of verse 14 and speaks of assessing something. The “all things,” in context, must be all things as they pertain to the gospel. Also in the context of 1 Corinthians 1-2, as well as the rest of the Pauline writings, this assessment does not come apart from God’s Spirit working through the Word of God. In contrast, the person regenerated by the Spirit can be properly assessed by no unbeliever (that “no one” means no unbeliever is again understood from the context). Paul is not saying that no Christian should ever be assessed by another Christian, for such would run contrary to what he says elsewhere in his writings (cf. 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Thes. 5:14).

¹¹⁵ Thayer’s Lexicon, en loc.

¹¹⁶ It is important that we recognize the place of repentance in salvation. In the same way that we saw from Titus 2:11-14 (chapters one and two) redemption applied to a person leads to a desire to obey God, so we see the same result in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:16. With awareness he is a sinner and needs salvation (1:19), the sinner turns to Christ, to trust him as Savior (1:24; 2:2-5). This can happen because the Spirit of God enables him to understand and assess properly the gospel (2:12-14). Having then, the mind of Christ (2:16), such a person sees positively God’s mercy in Christ (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Thes. 1:6), has grief and hatred of his sin (2 Cor. 7:10), and desires to follow God in obedience (Rom. 1:5). This is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:30, where we learn the Christian in Christ is sanctified, meaning he is set aside for the glory of God. It is also alluded to in 2:7 where we learn that the end of redemption for the saint is glorification, which elsewhere for Paul demands the preceding growth in holiness for the saint (Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6). Additionally, later in the letter Paul teaches the Corinthian saints the reality that since they have been purchased by Christ with a great price, are united to Christ, and therefore are a temple of the Holy Spirit they should glorify God in their bodies (1 Cor. 6:12-20). This is why Paul can also call the Corinthians to persevere in their faith to the glory of God by turning away from idolatry, based upon the example of Old Testament wilderness believers (1 Cor. 10:1-33).

This line of thought shows that Paul, in addition to other New Testament writers, saw faith and repentance as two sides of the same coin (e.g. Mt. 3:8; Mk. 1:15). What is repentance? “The Greek word used in the New Testament for ‘repentance’ means ‘a gracious change of mind’, brought about by gospel principles and promises, leading the whole soul to conversion to God.” John Owen, *Apostasy From The Gospel*, Abridged by R. J. K. Law (Carlisle, Pa: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2003, repr.), 27. In other words, “repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and grasp of the mercy of God in Christ and because he’s grieved at and hates his sin, turns from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” Modified from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, #87. Because of the necessity of repentance, we must call people to turn from their sin and seeking to be their own God and to turn to faith in Christ for salvation. Paul writes, “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10). Such turning includes receiving the Word with “the joy of the Holy Spirit” and turning from idolatry “to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes. 1:6, 9). Yet, much evangelism today lacks this call to repentance. It appears to have lost sight of the goal of God’s work of salvation, namely God’s glory through the conversion of his saints into godly, holy people.

As such, the result of such evangelistic work is people who profess faith in Christ, yet show few signs of true conversion.

We must remember that the free gift of salvation not only includes eternal life, but the faith to trust in and follow the Savior and this results in the saint being God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation leads to a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17).

How do we all people to repentance? Here is an example from J.C. Ryle (*The Christian Race & Other Sermons*, "Enoch" [Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishing, 2002], 200): "You all wish to go to heaven. I know it. I am fully persuaded of it. I am certain of it. There is not one of you, however false may be your views of what you must believe and what you must do, however unscriptural the ground of your hope, however worldly-minded you may be, however careless when you get outside that church door--there is not one of you, I say, who does not wish to go to heaven when they die. But I do sadly fear that many of you, without a mighty change, will never get there! You would like the crown--but you do not like the cross! You would like the glory--but not the grace! You would like the happiness--but not the holiness! You would like the peace--but not the truth! You would like the victory--but not the fight! You would like the reward--but not the labor! You would like the harvest--but not the ploughing! You would like the reaping--but not the sowing! And so I fear that many of you will never get to heaven!"

¹¹⁷ J. Mack Stiles, *Marks Of The Messenger: Knowing, Living, And Speaking The Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 19.

¹¹⁸ It is also noteworthy that evangelicalism-at-large (at the least the form I am the most familiar with, that found in the United States) has bought into other unbiblical beliefs that have bearing upon our youth. First, we make too great a division between evangelism and discipleship-oriented teaching (a topic we will address below). Second, we have bought into the unbiblical, unwise thinking of the "teen" being a third and separate category between childhood and adulthood and, as such, we conclude that somehow if you are between 13 and 18 you must be reached in a way that is different than that of an adult or even a child. The solution is to come back to a biblically-informed and rich view of who man is, what his problem is, what the Bible teaches about parenting, and what the Bible teaches about evangelism—all topics that are to be shaped by the core of God's Word, i.e. the gospel and its entailments!

¹¹⁹ Packer, *Evangelism*, 122.

¹²⁰ J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness: The Puritan Vision Of The Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 292.

¹²¹ Whenever possible we should be ready to share the gospel with someone when all we have is one opportunity. One way to do that is to share the main points of the gospel. Our congregation has summarized those truths in *The Five Most Important Truths*, available at mindenefc.org. I also try to have a booklet or two with me wherever I am. Two very good ones are John Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions* (EP Books, 2010, pocketbook edition), and John Piper, *For Your Joy* (Desiring God, 2009). Since the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) and since God will often use multiple steps leading up to the effective call and conversion of the elect, such as someone first proclaiming the gospel, someone or many someones coming along and explaining the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6), it makes sense for us to be regularly and often going about and sowing the seed (Mt. 13:3f.) whenever and wherever we can. The point is not that we cannot or should not share the gospel in such situations (we should). However, we should not make this the only or main approach used. When possible, we should seek to teach the gospel and call people to faith and repentance in a way they can understand and be truly converted by the Spirit of God.

¹²² Packer, *A Quest*, 164.

¹²³ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God* (IVP), 49, writes: "Clearly, in Paul's view, his first and fundamental job as a preacher of the gospel was to communicate knowledge—to get gospel truth fixed in men's minds. To him, teaching the truth was the basic evangelistic activity; to him, therefore, the only right method of evangelism was the teaching method."

¹²⁴ Packer, *A Quest*, 301-2.

¹²⁵ It may be helpful to invite an unsaved friend to a social gathering of the small group or home Bible study first so they can begin to get to know the Christians before being invited to a group teaching setting. The group should be praying for unbelieving friends like this and opportunities to reach out to them and love them. In that context, then they can be invited to small groups and worship services. A very fruitful and helpful means of helping unbelievers understand the gospel in a group setting is to use the simple, clear, and sound six week overview of the Gospel of Mark, *Christianity Explained*, by Michael Bennett.

¹²⁶ Packer, *Evangelism*, 41, writes: “The way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the gospel message.”

¹²⁷ Paul also writes that we have been entrusted with the gospel (1 Thes. 2:4; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Titus 1:3), meaning that God has given it to us and we are to preserve it by faithfully proclaiming it.

¹²⁸ See Packer, *Evangelism*, 28-29, for more in-depth discussion of this point.

¹²⁹ I have taken these five truths and adapted them from Jerry Bridges, “Gospel-Driven Sanctification,” *Modern Reformation*, 12, 3 (May/June, 2003): 13-16. This article can be accessed on-line at modernreformation.org. It is crucial we understand the way we appropriate these truths is by trusting Jesus Christ. We are not only justified by faith in Christ, we are also sanctified by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:20; Titus 2:11-14; 3:5-6).

Commenting on the ongoing necessity of the gospel for growth, Tim Keller writes: “We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is the way we grow (Gal.3:1-3) and are renewed (Col.1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom.1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows. “The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience.” But Col.1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and “hard work” that is not arising from and “in line” with the gospel will not sanctify you--it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them “to the word of his grace, which can build you up” (Acts 20:32). Tim Keller, “The Centrality Of The Gospel,” 2. This is a position paper for Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, available at: www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/centrality.pdf.

¹³⁰ Keller, “The Centrality,” 2-3.

¹³¹ D. A. Carson, “The Biblical Gospel,” in *For Such A Time As This: Perspectives On Evangelicalism, Past, Present, And Future*, Steve Brady, Harold Rowdon, ed’s. (Evangelical Alliance: London, 1996), 75-85. This essay appeared on the Between Two Worlds web site by permission of the publisher and so actual page numbers from the book edition are not present.

¹³² Keller, “The Centrality,” 3.

¹³³ Keller, “The Centrality,” 3.

¹³⁴ To the Ephesians Paul similarly exhorts (Eph. 4:22-24): “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23**and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24**and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

¹³⁵ Charles Leiter, *Justification And Regeneration* (Hannibal, Missouri: Granted Ministries Press, 2009, repr.), 84.

¹³⁶ Leiter, *Justification*, 84.

¹³⁷ John Piper, from a sermon on Colossians 3:5-17, given on January 17, 1999, at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Available at desiringgod.org.

¹³⁸ Timothy J. Keller, "Puritan Resources For Biblical Counseling," *The Journal Of Pastoral Practice*, 9, 3 (1988): 24. In this definition Keller quotes John Owen's 1656 classic *Of The Mortification Of Sin In Believers*.

¹³⁹ These descriptions are taken from J. I. Packer, "Mortification," in *God's Words: Studies Of Key Bible Themes* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), 181, 184.

¹⁴⁰ John Owen, *Sin And Temptation: The Challenges Of Personal Godliness*, James M. Houston, ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996, repr.), 165.

¹⁴¹ I am indebted to John Piper, *A Hunger For God: Desiring God Through Fasting And Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 33, for this insight.

¹⁴² Owen, *Sin And Temptation*, 28.

¹⁴³ Jonathan Dodson, *Fight Clubs: Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Austin City Life: The Resurgence, 2009), 25.

¹⁴⁴ This example is a compilation of men with whom I have worked through the years, as well as my own experience.

¹⁴⁵ I am indebted to Edward T. Welch, *Addictions, A Banquet In The Grave: Finding Hope In The Power Of The Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), for bringing to mind this biblical picture of addiction.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting With God In A Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 55.

¹⁴⁷ What we have depicted in these last few paragraphs is that God grows us out of the gospel, that is, we can be strong in Christ and the power that comes from his might, only as the gospel's impact is grown through the means of God's grace in us (cf. Eph. 6:10-18), things such as His Word, prayer, and the regular assembling together with other believers. Pastor Michael Bullmore has referred to this as placing ourselves "in the stream of God's grace" (From Justin Taylor, Oct. 27, 2011 Between Two Worlds blog post.). For a good gospel-centered treatment of the use of God's means of grace, see Joel R. Beeke, James A. LaBelle, *Living By God's Promises* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 141-163; and Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991).

¹⁴⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning And Evening Devotions*, November 2, evening reading.

¹⁴⁹ John Owen, *Of The Mortification Of Sin In Believers*, Ch. 2. Accessed on November 3, 2011 at: www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.v.html.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning And Evening Devotions*, July 4, morning reading, explains: "Sanctification begins in regeneration.... This work, which begins in the new birth, is carried on in two ways—mortification, whereby the lusts of the flesh are subdued and kept under; and vivification, by which the life which God has put within us is made to be a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, #35, defines sanctification as, "the work of God's free grace by which we are renewed in the whole person after the image of God, and enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness."

¹⁵¹ Tim Keller, "Redeemer Vision Paper #1: The Gospel: Key To Change," available at faithpcachurch.org/Gospel_KeytoChange_TimKeller.pdf.

¹⁵² The verb found in Heb. 12:14 that is translated “strive” (*diōkō*), is used twice by Luke to relay what Jesus said to Paul on the road to Damascus in regard to his acts of persecution: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? ...I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

The exhortation to “strive for peace with everyone” simply means diligently work through conflicts and have a wholeness of relationship that includes love.

Finally, it should be noted that in a book which shows the superiority of Christ over angels, the Law, and Moses; shows that the Law never could save (ch’s. 7-10); and affirms the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ (2:1-4; 10:1, 12-14), Heb. 12:14 is not teaching that the pursuit of holiness earns salvation. Rather, since the pursuit of holiness necessarily arises out of true salvation and is evidence of salvation, it can be said that without such a pursuit, there is no true salvation and that person will not see the Lord. This is the same point Jesus makes in Mt. 5:8.

¹⁵³ I am indebted to Jonathan Leeman, *The Church And The Surprising Offense Of God’s Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 99ff., for this insight.

¹⁵⁴ Leeman, *The Church*, 100.

¹⁵⁵ BAGD, 127. This understanding of the term is based largely upon context (e.g. Heb. 11:24-26). Most likely the present participle in this context suggests a continual or progressive action.

¹⁵⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline Of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 45-60.

¹⁵⁷ Drew Goodmanson, “Preaching The Gospel To Yourself” (Nov. 5, 2005). This article is available at kaleochurch.com.

¹⁵⁸ Steven L. Childers, “True Spirituality: The Transforming Power Of The Gospel,” 4. This article is available at gca.cc/mediafiles/true-spirituality-by-childers.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Such a mindset removes the anxiety of having to figure out how we must be creative enough to whew people into the kingdom or to help them grow. Also, such a restful approach to ministry itself honors God.

¹⁶⁰ We have already made allusions to many ramifications of Christ-centered Word ministry and so will not elaborate any more upon them. This includes things such as preaching and teaching that Christ is the center of the Bible (so, for example, the main point of the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4 is not to provide a model for how we deal with temptation, though that is secondary; it is to show how he is the beloved Son [Mt. 3:17] who has succeeds where the first Adam and Israel failed); we must lift up and put Christ on display, not our own ingenuity or creativity (1 Cor. 2:1-5); we must reject Word ministry methods which lift us up and eclipse Jesus Christ in the minds of the hearers (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:2:1-2); we will not assume the gospel of Jesus Christ with people as we teach, train, or counsel them; we will not change the gospel to make it more palatable (Gal. 1:8-10); and we will teach people their hope is in Christ (Col. 1:27).

¹⁶¹ Keller, “Gospel-Centered Ministry,” 3-4. Tim Keller, “Gospel-Centered Ministry: 1 Peter 1:1-12 and 1:22-2:12, Excerpts From A Sermon,” *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal* (Spring 2008): 3-4. This article is available at: thespurgeonfellowship.org/Downloads/Excerpt_Sp08.pdf.

¹⁶² See Edward T. Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2004), 123-132.

¹⁶³ Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big And God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, And The Fear Of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 14, 95-134.

¹⁶⁴ Edward T. Welch, *Addictions, A Banquet In The Grave: Finding Hope In The Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 141-179.

¹⁶⁵ Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed By Jesus From The Idols We Worship And The Wounds We Carry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011). The resources I have cited in these last four notes (including this one) are excellent examples of tools that help us apply the direction of the gospel in the ministry of the Word, especially in the cure of souls.

¹⁶⁶ I am indebted to Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption*, 103-117, for this insight. Wilkerson provides a case-wise model throughout his book for how to help the hurting turn from their idols to Christ.

¹⁶⁷ On “affection,” *Webster’s Dictionary* (1828 edition) has the following: “Affection is a permanent bent of the mind, formed by the presence of an object, or by some act of another person.... In a more particular sense, [it is] a...good will, love or zealous attachment; as, the affection of a parent for his child. [It is also] desire; inclination; propensity....” So, when we speak of shaping the affections, we are speaking of shaping one’s desire, their bent of mind, their inclination toward Christ.

¹⁶⁸ This thought is from a poem written by John Piper, entitled “Love Her More By Loving Her Less,” and is found in *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 255-260.

¹⁶⁹ *Morning And Evening Devotions*, November 16 (evening reading).

¹⁷⁰ From Answer #100 in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

¹⁷¹ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 24.

¹⁷² Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism*, 14. See also pages 71-77 for a fuller treatment.

¹⁷³ For an example out of history (Ulrich Zwingli), see Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering The Heart Of The Reformation* (Nashville, B & H, 2010), 69-71. For a defense of such preaching see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching In A Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), chapters 3-4.

¹⁷⁴ My practice for the quarter of a century I have been in full-time vocational ministry has been to devote ten hours a week to exegetical study over and above my sermon preparation, to read the Bible through once every one to two years, and in recent years to memorize one new verse (or a few verses) a week while I also spend a few minutes each day reviewing Scripture already committed to memory. I also have read and indexed 50-60 books per year.

¹⁷⁵ It must be remembered all that was said under all Word ministry above applies to discipleship as well. Additionally, if any public teaching is done as part of the discipleship process, then the comments under preaching would also apply.

¹⁷⁶ The concept of the cure of the soul refers to helping people with problems at the depth of their being, something that is often called counseling today. For the concept see David Powlison, “Cure Of Souls And The Modern Psychotherapies,” in *Westminster Today*, 4, 1 (Summer 2011): 7ff. It is based on a picture of the teacher, the discipler, the counselor, serving as a “physician of the soul”. See Ken L. Sarles, “The English Puritans: A Historical Paradigm Of Biblical Counseling,” in John F. MacArthur, Jr., Wayne Mack, ed’s., *Introduction To Biblical Counseling* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 21.

¹⁷⁷ It has been my experience over the years that if Christians will be able to ask tough questions of each other about very specific ethical issues in one’s life, it works best to be no more than 2-3 people of the same sex meeting together regularly and who build with each other a significant level of trust. In such a very small group of people, it is certainly not wrong to ask accountability questions that can serve to stop a person in their tracks when they face a significant temptation, questions such as, “Did you expose yourself to any sexually explicit material this past week?” God, in his grace, can and does use such questions so that the Christian can pause and think clearly about the temptation currently facing him. However, there is

an even deeper armory the soldier in battle can go to—being strong in Christ (Eph. 6:10). Fellow Christians must learn how to encourage each other not just to say, “Yes,” to God and “No” to sin, but also to do that by looking to the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). A good resource for such 2-3 people groups is gospelcenterreddiscipleship.com. An especially helpful resource on that site is *Fight Clubs: Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, by Jonathan Dodson.

¹⁷⁸ An excellent resource for equipping Christians to help each other in the art of soul care is the DVD series by Paul David Tripp, Timothy S. Lane, *Instruments In The Redeemer’s Hands: How To Help Others Change* (New Growth Press, 2011), available through the Christian Counseling And Education Foundation.

¹⁷⁹ This example highlights also why strong rich discipleship is necessary within the Church. Christians must learn that God’s Spirit works powerfully through the Word, the core of which is the gospel, and they must also learn what that Word says, and how to apply it. As this happens, people will become more confident in Christ to face hard situations and also to call each other to do hard things—confident the grace of Christ is sufficient to empower for change.

¹⁸⁰ Again, it should be kept in mind all that has been said so far in this chapter under all Word ministry and under discipleship applies also to parenting. What is more, to the degree that parents put together any kind of lessons for their children, the direction under preaching would also have application. It also must not be overlooked that the placement of parenting in this chapter is very intentional and very appropriate. Proverbs 22:6 reads: “Give training to a child according to the Word of God in reference to his manner of life, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Author’s own translation). Clearly, this Word ministry is first and foremost to be carried out by parents (Dt. 6:4-7; Prov. 4:20-27; 6:20-23). Such, is also supported in the New Testament: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction which is from and about the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, Author’s own translation). Parents should see that their primary responsibility with their children is to disciple them in Christ for the glory of God.

¹⁸¹ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding A Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd Press, 1995).

¹⁸² Of course, parents will strive by the grace of Christ to protect their children from running into traffic and from sexually explicit material and so many things from which they should be sheltered.

¹⁸³ To be reminded of the wonderful opportunity parents have to disciple their sons and daughters, especially during the teen years to help them be shaped by Christ’s grace into godly young men and women, see Paul David Tripp, *Age Of Opportunity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

¹⁸⁴ Regarding being shaped by culture, many denominations and associations in the United States that have had a congregational form of church government have been shaped more by the surrounding culture of democracy than they have by Scripture when it comes to Church structure. This goes so far among some that they emphasize a flow chart in which the congregation is at the top with leadership underneath. Leadership (which historically was a pastor and deacon board among many of these churches) was primarily tasked with carrying out the democratic wishes of the voting congregation. In such congregations, even when they began to go to multiple elders, those elders function more like an administrative board than a council of godly, discipling shepherds. All-in-all, within this type of structure, though the gospel may be seen as important for evangelism, it certainly does not direct what the Church does.

¹⁸⁵ Mark E. Dever, *A Display Of God’s Glory* (Washington, D.C.: Center For Church Reform, 2001), 1.

¹⁸⁶ Tim Keller, “Gospel-Centered Ministry: 1 Peter 1:1-12 and 1:22-2:12, Excerpts From A Sermon,” *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal* (Spring 2008): 8. This article is available at: thespurgeonfellowship.org/Downloads/Excerpt_Sp08.pdf.

¹⁸⁷ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church And The Surprising Offense Of God’s Love: Reintroducing The Doctrines Of Church Membership And Discipline* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 16.

¹⁸⁸ Though “vocational” and “non-vocational” are not the best terms to use in light of the reality all elders/pastors are to have a sense upon them that God has called them to their ministry through His Spirit giving to them the desire and gifting to serve in this capacity (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), yet, these terms have become a fairly standard way of distinguishing between elders/pastors who receive their income via pastoral ministry and those whose income comes from elsewhere.

¹⁸⁹ I believe it is appropriate to use Acts 6:4 as a model for elders/pastors, even though it was speaking of apostles. I say this because Peter, an apostle, also saw himself as an elder (1 Pet. 5:1); Paul believed elders to be entrusted with the gospel and its accurate proclamation just as were apostles (cf. 1 Thes. 2:4; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Tit. 1:3); and also because the Pastoral Epistles seem to lay emphasis upon Word ministry for the pastors (1 Tim. 3:2; 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:2-5; Tit. 1:9-10) and James upon prayer (Jam. 5:14), suggesting that elders in congregations had a similar ministry to the apostles.

¹⁹⁰ Paul’s remarks to Titus are very similar to what he says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24-26, addressing “the Lord’s servant” (here most likely speaking of an elder) who “must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **25**correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26**and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” In addition to teaching, the other difference between deacons and elders is that the latter must also be able to exercise oversight of the church, since he will give an account for those under his care (1 Tim. 3:1, 4-5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

¹⁹¹ D. A. Carson, “What Is The Gospel?-Revisited,” in Sam Storms, Justin Taylor, ed’s., *For The Fame Of God’s Name: Essays In Honor Of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 166f.

¹⁹² Leeman, *The Church*, 333-34.

¹⁹³ The following points are summarized from Leeman, *The Church*, 333.

¹⁹⁴ David Powlison, cited by Justin Taylor in the November 26, 2011 post on the “Between Two World” blogs, asserts: “The relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry. But let me focus the question through a particular verse in the New Testament which long troubled me. The last line of 1 John woos, then commands us: ‘Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols’ (1 John 5:21). In a 105-verse treatise on living in vital fellowship with Jesus, the Son of God, how on earth does that unexpected command merit being the final word?” Powlison concludes his answer with these words: “In contrast, to ‘keep yourself from idols’ is to live with a whole heart of faith in Jesus. It is to be controlled by all that lies behind the address ‘Beloved children’.... The alternative to Jesus, the swarm of alternatives, whether approached through the lens of flesh, world, or the Evil One, is idolatry.”

¹⁹⁵ One of the gospel realities that also demand small communities of people who interact together regularly flows from the words of Jesus to his disciples and us in John 13:35: “By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It seems to me that one of the best ways to go about teaching the gospel to unbelievers is to invite them to spend time in such communities where they can see firsthand and close-up just how Christians love each other. Such will show them just how the Spirit of God changes believers through the gospel and, as such, this profession of faith is real. Such loving, merciful, holy, God-fearing deportment in close proximity creates a powerful atmosphere in which the gospel can be received with great power and others won to Christ (Acts 4:32-34; 1 Peter 3:2-3)

¹⁹⁶ Since being gospel-directed takes time to be with fellow believers, consider how the gospel impacts our life, shape the hearts of our children, pray, and to build relationships with the lost that we might share the gospel, one of the great enemies of operating as a gospel-directed congregation is being overly busy. Those churches that prize being as busy as they can (as if that suggests they are more fruitful or “successful”), will run the risk of falling into the rut of simply getting stuff done by moving from one thing to another, to another—and most likely the gospel will get lost in the shuffle.

¹⁹⁷ Mark Galli, “Speak The Gospel: Use Deeds When Necessary,” *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2009. Available at christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-142.0.html?start=1

¹⁹⁸ Justin Taylor, “A Quick Thought,” in the May 8, 2009 *Between Two Worlds* blog post. It is available at thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2009/05/08/quick-thought/.

¹⁹⁹ Kevin DeYoung, Greg Gilbert, *What Is The Mission Of The Church? Making Sense Of Social Justice, Shalom, And The Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 20. They list the Great Commission passages as: Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 13:10; 14:9; Lk. 24:44-49; Acts 1:8. Additionally, on page 16 they make it clear they desire Christians to help the suffering, to love their neighbors, and impact their cities. Additionally, they do not want Christians to think that evangelism is the only thing that matters. Nevertheless, they do want to make sure the gospel “is of first importance in our churches.”

²⁰⁰ D. A. Carson, “Editorial,” *Themelios*, 33, 2: 3. Available at the gospelcoalition.org/publications/33-2/editorial.

²⁰¹ By “public square” I am referring to the realm where decisions are made and influence takes place that has impact upon individuals and a culture. The primary focus in these last two chapters when that phrase is used will be the political arena. The public square, as used by Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion And Democracy In America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 28, is made up of multiple public squares that include: politics, family, work, education, entertainment, and, I would add, news media.

²⁰² See Chapter Two and Appendix Two for what Paul means by “good works” in Titus and in the rest of his writings respectively.

By “mercy ministry” I mean the same thing Tim Keller does by “ministry of mercy”. In *Ministries Of Mercy: The Call Of The Jericho Road* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997, 2nd ed.), 11, he writes: “The phrase ‘ministry of mercy,’ which we will use throughout this book, comes from [Luke 10:37], where Jesus commands us to provide shelter, finances, medical care, and friendship to people who lack them.” Luke 10:36-37, at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan, reads: “‘Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go and do likewise.’”

²⁰³ I choose these areas as representative of mercy ministry, not only because experience suggests these are often the focal point, but also they are what Jesus mentions in Mt. 25:31-46 when he addresses how one’s treatment of his disciples demonstrates whether or not he has eternal life.

²⁰⁴ This interview is available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/february/6.56.html>. Of significance is that Cnaan also argued in this piece that sociologist Christian Smith at Duke University came to similar conclusions.

²⁰⁵ Marvin Olasky, citing Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity In The Ancient Church* (1883), in his article “The Rise And Fall Of Christian Charity,” in *World*, 25, 13 (July 3, 2010): 67ff.

²⁰⁶ Gene Edward Veith, “Back To Barbarism,” *TableTalk*, 30, 8 (August 2006): 62-63.

²⁰⁷ David W. Hall, *Calvin In The Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, And Civil Liberties* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 106-128.

²⁰⁸ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic Books, 1990, repr.), 180-81.

²⁰⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, in *The Complete Works Of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 5: 452.

²¹⁰ Chuck Colson, in a November 16, 2007 Breakpoint commentary. This is available at breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries.

²¹¹ Randy Alcorn, "Heavenly-Minded Men," *Eternal Perspectives* (Spring 2008): 4, gives examples of Christians throughout history who were heavily involved in mercy ministry. "John Wesley (17-3-1791) [was] co-founder of Methodism [and] opposed slavery and encouraged mineworkers to resist inhumane treatment by their employers." "William Carey (1761-1834) [was a] pioneer missionary to India [who] took infants into his home when they were left to die and gave medical care to the abandoned sick and lepers. [He also] fought to make illegal the detestable practice of burning widows alive on their husbands' funeral pyres." "Lewish Tappan (1788-1873) [was] a successful businessman [and] founded the Magdalene Society, which ministered to unwed mothers in New York City. [He] also helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society." "Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) [was] the famed author and Baptist preacher [and] built 17 homes to help care for elderly women and homes for orphans in London, rescuing them from starvation and vice on the streets." "Robert G. LeTourneau (1888-1969) [was] the father of modern earth-moving equipment...[and] was among the few men who amassed a fortune during the Great Depression. He gave away 90 percent of company profits and 90 percent of his personal income."

²¹² Chuck Colson, in a January 5, 2005 Breakpoint commentary. This is available at breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries.

Marvin Olasky, *World* (Sept. 1/8, 2007): 20, concurs with the propensity for Christians to engage in mercy ministry and even argues that the more biblically conservative they are, the more apt to give. "Compassionate conservatism is dead in Washington but alive and well across the country.... The statistical evidence is in a book published last year, Arthur Brook's *Who Really Cares* (Basic, 2006). He showed that, measured by the giving of both money and time, conservatives are more compassionate than liberals, and religious conservatives are far more compassionate than secular conservatives...."

²¹³ Tim Keller, in a December 6, 2010 *Christianity Today* interview with Kristen Scharold, says that it is evil for people not to care about the poor and that "if you have been changed by the grace of God, it will move you toward the poor." This is so much the case Keller asserts a Christian cannot disciple another Christian without telling them, "Help the poor." This interview is available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/december/10.69.html>.

Olasky, "Rise And Fall:" 67ff., demonstrates how false teaching can short-change mercy ministries by telling how generosity toward the poor began to wane in the Middle Ages as the gospel was being twisted and replaced with false teaching that moved people to give to the Church to secure their own salvation, rather than as a securely saved people who could rest in God's grace and freely give to the poor in the same way they had freely received.

²¹⁴ How the gospel directs each of these areas (personal and public square mercy ministry) could easily demand treatment in its own full-length book. So, what follows will merely be an "appetizer" or "sampler" to help us begin thinking through how the gospel directs these important ministries.

²¹⁵ Philip Ryken, "A Reformed Theology For Mercy Ministry," *Reformation 21* (September 2007). Available at reformation21.org.

²¹⁶ Ryken, "A Reformed Theology For Mercy Ministry."

²¹⁷ For a good theological treatment of personal and public square mercy ministries which flows from the reality we are created in the image of God and God is a God of justice, see Steven C. Roy, "Embracing Social Justice: Reflections From The Storyline Of Scripture," *Trinity Journal*, 30, 1 (Spring 2009): 3-48.

²¹⁸ Tim Keller writes: "The plot-line of the Bible is this: 1) God created the world, 2) The world and humanity fell into sin and decay, 3) But God sends his Son to redeem the world and create a new humanity, and 4) Eventually the whole world will be renewed. Death, decay, injustice, and suffering will be all removed.

“The gospel then is not just about individual happiness and fulfillment. It is not just a wonderful plan for ‘my life’ but a wonderful plan for the world. It is about the coming of God’s kingdom to renew everything. Gospel-centered churches do not only urge individuals to be converted, but also to seek peace and justice in our cities and in our world.” Tim Keller, “Redeemer Vision Paper #1: The Gospel: Key To Change,” available at faithpcachurch.org/Gospel_KeytoChange_TimKeller.pdf

²¹⁹ Ryken, “A Reformed Theology For Mercy Ministry,” does a very good job of unpacking how different aspects of our theology should move us to follow God’s practice and should motivate us toward fuller, richer mercy ministry. He concludes his treatment with these powerful words: “This brings us, at last, to what is really the thesis of this essay: it is not simply this part or that part of our theology that compels us to show mercy; it is everything in the whole Reformed system of doctrine. To reiterate: it is not just part of our theology that calls us to mercy ministry; it is everything in our entire theology. We must never forget that every doctrine that is taught in every part of Scripture from creation to the final judgment compels us to show the mercy of God to lost sinners, in the gospel of His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

²²⁰ This is especially exemplified in 2 Corinthians 8-9, in which Paul motivates the Corinthians to follow through on a commitment they had made to give to help needy saints. In addition to setting forth the motivations of the example of the giving of Macedonian Christians (8:1-5), as well as the example of Jesus Christ himself (8:9), Paul clarifies that such mercy shows that a person’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ is genuine (8:8; 9:13). Additionally, he explains that God provides sufficient grace for whatever good work to which he calls a believer (9:8-11), he shows that great rewards come from such generous giving (9:6), which include benefit to others (9:12a), thanksgiving to God (9:11-12), the glorification of God (9:13), and often deepened relationships between the giver and recipient (9:14).

We would do well to follow Paul’s example, as well as the example of Jesus Christ (Luke 10:25-37; 12:33; 18:22), and teach the Church the importance of gospel-directed mercy ministry.

Another way to put this is commitment to the primacy of the gospel not only demands the gospel be proclaimed, but also that: “It is the basis and mainspring for Christian practice, individually and corporately, inside the church and outside. Gospel ministry is not only proclaiming it to people so that they will embrace it and believe it; it is also teaching and shepherding believers with it so that it shapes the entirety of their lives, so that they can “live it out.” And one of the most prominent areas that the gospel effects is our relationship to the poor.” Keller, “The Gospel And The Poor,” 9.

²²¹ Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries Of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997, 2nd ed.), 65.

²²² I am indebted to Keller, “The Gospel And The Poor,” 14-15, for this line of thinking.

²²³ What kinds of help for the poor should be taken up by the church corporately and what kinds should be taken up by individual believers who create organizations outside the church (parachurch ministries)? Tim Keller suggests that the church engage in relief work, some development work, but leave more complex development work and also reform work for those outside the church. Keller, “The Gospel And The Poor,” 20-21. On this last point the thought is that Christians, shaped by the gospel, will engage through other ministries, but not primarily as the Church.

²²⁴ Marvin Olasky, “Gospel Work,” *World*, 25, 12 (June 19, 2010): 34.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

Alvin L. Reid, “Reaching A Postmodern World Through Servant Evangelism,” *Southern Baptist Journal Of Theology*, 5, 1 (Spring 2001): 60-69, refers to this as “servant evangelism,” “a combination of intentional personal witness with intentional acts of kindness.” Reid, a professor of evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, believes our current society desperately needs to witness the entailments of the gospel (service) accompanying the claims of the gospel to see that it is genuine.

²²⁶ Keller, *Ministries Of Mercy*, 58.

²²⁷ It is true that priority is given in the New Testament to helping fellow believers (e.g. Mt. 25:31-46; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:3-16). However, this does not mean the Church is not called to help those who are not fellow believers. After all, we are called to love our enemies, which will often include the unsaved (Mt. 5:43-47). What is more, in two different passages the Apostle Paul does clarify that priority of mercy is given to fellow believers, yet it also includes those outside the faith. Gal. 6:10 reads: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." 1 Thes. 5:15: "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

²²⁸ This is also seen in the parable of the talents with the third servant, the unfaithful steward, who hid his master's resources, rather than working with them to multiply them. In Mt. 25:26 Jesus describes the master's words to this servant this way: "You wicked and slothful servant!" Part of the pronouncement of judgment was that this man had been slothful. The pattern of meaning suggests that God has entrusted many different things to people, which includes their abilities, and part of God's judgment will involved how they used those abilities. For example, did the creative marketer and the gifted singer use their talents to benefit others and glorify God, or did they use them to peddle denigrating, unholy, sexually-explicit trash?

²²⁹ In this Proverbs text I believe the excellent wife not only speaks of a godly woman, but most likely serves as a fitting conclusion to the biblical collection of proverbs in which wisdom has been personified as a woman (8:1ff.; 9:1ff.). This acrostic poem shows not only how the wise, godly woman lives, but also gives a description of how anyone who is wise and godly lives. Within this description, we find that "She perceives that her profit is good" (v. 18a, author's translation). In other words, her hard, steady, creative, productive work (13-17, 18b-19, 27) is good in that it brings great benefit to her family (21, 27) and to those who are poor (20). This woman is described as one who fears the LORD (30), which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). The conclusion is inescapable, namely that God is pleased with hard, productive work that images him, glorifies him, and benefits others!

²³⁰ Mona Charen, *Do-Gooders* (New York: Sentinel, 2004); Thomas Sowell, *Applied Economics: Thinking Beyond Stage One* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Wayne Grudem, *Business For The Glory Of God: The Bible's Teaching On The Moral Goodness Of Business* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 79-83; Wayne Grudem, *Politics According To The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 261-318. One of the ways that poor families can be hurt the worst is by creating a sense of victimization and dependence on others that can be passed from generation to generation and thus creates a situation in which children and children's children never learn to work and to be God's instruments in their own lives for provision. Here is where we must note the importance of faith-fueled obedience as an outgrowth of the divine work of the gospel in the life of the individual. Such following of God's ways as a born-again person (or even as an unsaved person, to the degree one can generally follow God's ways for work and provision) is not only God-glorifying, but beneficial to the followers (Dt. 10:12-13).

²³¹ This does not mean deacons cannot be capable teachers or preachers. Two of the first seven deacons, Stephen (Acts 7:1-53) and Philip (Acts 8:4-8, 26-40), were very capable when it came to proclaiming the Word of God.

²³² It is my conviction that pastors (Eph. 4:11; Ac. 20:38, 29; 1 Peter 5:2, 4), elders (Ac. 20:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1), and overseers (Ac. 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7) all refer to the same office, a reality quite easy to prove from a reading of the just-mentioned texts that equate all three. Each of the three terms highlights a different aspect of the pastor/elder ministry or views it in a way that emphasizes a different characteristic of the ministry. The main difference between various pastors/elders in the New Testament would come down to whether a pastor/elder carries out his ministry as also his occupation (1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18) or not (1 Cor. 9:12, 15; 1 Thes. 2:9).

²³³ Our congregation currently is reworking how elders and deacons function. Years ago the congregation went to a plurality of elders. However, the elders functioned for the most part much like an administrative board, rather than a council of shepherds/pastors. We have spent three years teaching what Scripture says

about elders and also delving into what it says about deacons. Our next step is to teach more on the ministry of deacons and to beef up that ministry so the deacons take some of the administrative responsibilities away from the elders and also are more intentional in ministries of mercy. What is happening, as a result, is that we are seeing more significant Word and gospel work done through the church and also more significant mercy ministry.

It may also be helpful to note how God's Spirit, working in a congregation in conjunction with (and sometimes in addition to) the structure, can bring about mercy ministry. We have a couple within the church who has a passion for single parents and has started a ministry to those in our community who need help and encouragement. Bathrooms have been fixed, doors repaired, fences put up, and other help given. One single mom and her son were moved into a house and given help to get back on their feet through financial and life counseling. As I write this our senior high youth are preparing to deliver meals this coming week (just days before Christmas) to single parents in town. This is a ministry that has arisen as the Spirit of God has moved among a couple in our church, apart from the deacons. What we will be doing in the future, however, is coming alongside this ministry through our deacons so we can provide help and additional manpower. Also, we want to build a bridge from the church to these parents so they can hear the gospel. Most likely the man who started the ministry (and who is a competent teacher and evangelist by the way) will be one of our future deacons. Though he can teach God's Word adequately, ministries of mercy are the passion and calling of his wife and him.

²³⁴ Similarly, we must direct those we are helping to look to Jesus. If we practice ministries of mercy in step with the gospel, we must not present our self as the Savior, but rather point them to Jesus Christ.

²³⁵ For the different stances people take toward the Church's involvement in the public square, see Wayne Grudem, *Politics According To The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 23-76.

²³⁶ In the United States many rely upon a misunderstanding of the First Amendment to the Constitution ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...") to argue for a "a wall of separation between Church and state". For the understanding that a view of the First Amendment which sees it as excluding religious influence upon the public square is not consistent with the intent of its original writers, see Grudem, *Politics*, 136-37; 499-507.

²³⁷ John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative To Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 8, cited in Grudem, *Politics*, 44.

A slightly different approach, but nonetheless, the same conclusion that the Church should not be involved at all or very little, has been taken by seeker-driven churches through the years. As an example, in the mid 00's I attended a conference in which pastor and well-known author, Leith Anderson, was the main speaker. He made it clear that their church prohibited even educational political materials because they did not want to turn anyone away from Christ by suggesting they had to be of a particular political persuasion to be at their church.

²³⁸ For example, Cal Thomas, who was involved heavily with the Moral Majority while I was at Liberty, has drastically changed his stance on public square engagement by Christians in response to abuses he believes he has seen. Though Thomas still writes a syndicated column that focuses on politics the majority of the time, rather than calling Christians to engagement, he is more inclined to be a critic. For example, in an October 3, 2008 article ("Pulpit Bullies," Tribune Media Services. See www.calthomas.com/index.php?news=2381 [cited in Grudem, *Politics*, 44]), he wrote: "No matter how hard they try to protect the gospel from corruption, ministers who focus on politics and politicians as a means of redemption must minimize their ultimate calling and message. The road to redemption does not run through Washington, D.C. Politicians can't redeem themselves from the temptations of Washington. What makes anyone think they can redeem the rest of us?"

²³⁹ See Peter Smith, "Adoption Growing Among Evangelical Christians," January 18, 2011. Available at poundpuplegacy.org/node/4694. See also Kathryn Joyce, "The Evangelical Adoption Crusade," in *The Nation*. Available at the.nation.com/article/160096/evangelical-adoption-crusade.

²⁴⁰ One ministry that addresses such needs is Compassion (compassion.com). The growth of Compassion and similar ministries shows the interest Christians have in extending mercy to children.

²⁴¹ For the reality there is such a thing as post abortion trauma (and that it can increase incidents of child abuse), see T. Burke, David, C. Reardon, “Abortion Trauma And Child Abuse,” found at *Heartlink*. This is available at: heartlink.org/directors/abortion/A000000376.cfm.

Of course, a fully gospel-directed approach will seek to win as many people to Christ as possible and thus see as many hearts changed as possible—which will impact how a person approaches sexual activity, as well as their view of children.

²⁴² One other place in the New Testament where we at least see that the public square should move us to action is Acts 17:16-17 where we read of Paul in Athens, while he is waiting for Silas and Timothy to come to him. The text reads: “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.” In verse 19 Paul ended up addressing city leaders at the Areopagus (that is Mars Hill), where the city council met that oversaw morals, education, and religion. What is significant for our present purpose is that Paul’s spirit was moved, it was grieved because “he saw that the city was full of idols”. If the public square does not matter at all, it would seem that Paul would have overlooked this. Yet, he was grieved by and moved at the way in which an entire city was full of idolatry, along with how this would fill the city with arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). It was as a result of this, i.e. because of this, that he was moved to go to the synagogues and the marketplace, and then eventually was led to the city council. The dual lesson from Paul is that ultimately what matters is the gospel. Yet, at the same time, that very gospel moved him to be grieved at a culture that so set itself up against truth and served to keep people in darkness. It is this same concern that should, in part, move Christians (e.g. teachers in public schools, university professors, city councilmen, congressmen, senators, syndicated columnists, apologists, and voters) to engage in pre-evangelism as they seek to impact the public square by preparing people to hear the gospel and then by sharing that gospel itself.

²⁴³ Marvin Olasky, “Sticking By The Bible,” *World*, 24, 13 (July 4, 2009): 40, wrote: “[Calvin] thought the best way to tackle poverty was not to distribute alms but to open a business and employ those who would otherwise beg.”

²⁴⁴ See Thomas Sowell, *Applied Economics: Thinking Beyond Stage One* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Mona Charen, *Do-Gooders* (New York, New York: Sentinel, Penguin Group, 2004); and Hunter Lewis, *Where Keynes Went Wrong* (Mount Jackson, Va.: Axios, 2009).

²⁴⁵ Grudem, *Politics*, 261-319.

²⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Business For The Glory Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 80-81.

²⁴⁷ Grudem, *Business*, 82-83.

²⁴⁸ Richard Land, Barrett Duke, “Being Salt And Light In An Unsavory And Dark Age: The Christian And Politics,” *Southern Baptist Journal Of Theology*, 11, 4 (Winter 2007): 90-91.

²⁴⁹ D. A. Carson, “Editorial,” *Themelios*, 33, 2: 2. Available at the gospelcoalition.org/publications/33-2/editorial.

²⁵⁰ This does not mean that a person cannot be firm. A Christian columnist can and should write in such a way that she speaks the truth. However, it should flow from love, not anger (Eph. 4:15). The same is true of a politician or someone who meets with politicians to inform them on issues. A Christian can exercise a firm, truthful manner. Yet, a Christian should never cease being a Christian and put on some other role as if the ends justify the means.

This also does not mean that such righteous behavior will never stir up the anger of the world. It often will (Jn. 15:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12). However, we are to make sure if we suffer the ill treatment of the world it is for doing good (following the model of our Savior) and not for our sin (1 Peter 2:19-25).

²⁵¹ It is important that we do not judge our words and actions in the public square merely by the reactions the world has in response to them. It will be true that those who are their own gods and who hate the true God will often act with bitter hatred and vitriol against any Christian who dares speak the truth to others. In the same way the gospel is received very differently by those being saved and those who are perishing (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:18), so will truths spoken in the political arena, even those out of love and mercy, for the benefit of others, as well as the glory of God. Our calling as God's people is not to be fully responsible for the outcomes, but to be faithful to the truth and to the manner in which God calls us to speak and to correct opponents with gentleness and while teaching the truth with patience (2 Tim. 2:24-25). Yes, we can speak and act in such a way that unnecessarily turns people away from Christ (otherwise, this conversation would not be needed). Nevertheless, too many Christians have been wrongly convinced to be silent in the public square simply because there has been a previous negative reaction.

²⁵² Timothy George and John Woodbridge, *The Mark Of Jesus: Loving In A Way The World Can See* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 175-176, tell the following true story that illustrates our point.

The red lights of the camera went off. Thrilled by how well the debate had apparently unfolded, the evangelical spokesperson stepped off the television set. He approached his son who had watched the hard-hitting exchanges from behind the cameras. "Well, son, how do you think I did?" The twenty-something young man replied: "You were great, Dad. You destroyed the woman's arguments. It was a clear-cut win."

Knowing that his son was probably holding back another assessment, the father continued: "Ok, how do you think I really did?" With a pained expression, the son looked up at his dad. He then answered: "Dad, you won all right, but by your attitude you lost any further chance ever to speak again to the woman about Christ."

The father became crestfallen. He knew that his own son was struggling with the Christian faith, having seen too much hypocrisy and pride displayed by so-called "television personalities." Now he, the father, was adding his own example of how Christians sometimes treat others without respect, dignity, and love.

A few years later the father recounted this story to one of the present authors. He indicated that it was in the context of the conversation with his son that he arrived at a very unsettling insight. His failure to show respect and genuine love for others of different convictions constituted not only a stumbling block for them, but also for his own son. The father determined that, henceforth in his ministry and wholly dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit, he must bear the "mark of Jesus"—even in debates with persons who appeared unfriendly, if not dismissive of the faith and of himself.

²⁵³ We are called to pray for our government leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2). When we know that someone who is in office is a Christian, we should pray specifically for that individual to stand strong in living out the entailments of the gospel in a very difficult situation. We should also pray that they can have around them a group of fellow believers who can exhort them so they do not become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13).

²⁵⁴ It was the 19th-20th century Dutch theologian (and prime minister from 1901-1905), Abraham Kuyper, who clarified these different biblical spheres in the 1880 Stone lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, primarily in his third lecture, "Calvinism In Politics". See J. Budziszewski, "Four Shapers Of Evangelical Political Thought," in J. Budziszewski, ed., *Evangelicals In The Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 55-62. I am generally dependent on this material for the following discussion.

²⁵⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, in his 1947 work, *The Uneasy Conscience Of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), was one of the first Christian leaders in the twentieth century to call out to a retreating, isolated evangelicalism that the gospel had ramifications for the realm of society and state. See Budziszewski, "Four Shapers," 41-42.

²⁵⁶ One of the priorities the gospel-directed Church must always fight for is that it is not a lobbyist, nor is it a proponent of one particular party or candidate—in a way that suggests to people you must support this group or this person before you become a Christian. To promote the right priorities, it is wise for a Church to teach Christians the importance of merciful, loving, informed involvement, to teach on particular issues (e.g. sanctify of life, the importance of marriage, biblical views on economics), and even to educate on where candidates stand, but not to advocate for specific people or political parties.

²⁵⁷ See the chapter entitled “The Word Of God Is Ultimate” in Tom Barnes, *Every Word Counts* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2010), 109-121.

²⁵⁸ The point is not at all to shun the reading, listening to, or interacting with other sources of news, information, or views. We should do this. However, all must be judged by the ultimate authority of Scripture.

²⁵⁹ This is not to suggest that a great awakening in the Church that leads to significant shaping of the public square cannot or will not have far-reaching impact upon a land. History teaches us it will! However, Scripture and history also teach us that because of sin, such times of God-glorifying results will always have sinned mixed within and will not be permanent. If such an awakening happens in a land and the Lord Jesus Christ does not return soon thereafter, the need for awakening and social reform will come again. Such a reality should not dissuade us from involvement. Instead, we should seek to glorify God and benefit others by the grace of Christ as much as we can. Such faithfulness is never a losing battle for the believer!

²⁶⁰ Marvin Olasky, “Thorns And Thistles,” *World*, 25, 19 (September 25, 2010): 88.

²⁶¹ For a critique of non-gospel directed life in the Church see Michael Scott Horton, ed., *Power Religion: The Selling Out Of The Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody, 1997, repr.). For a work that complements this book, see Michael Horton, *The Gospel-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

²⁶² Good works also confirm true godliness (1 Tim. 2:10) and they should mark the elder (1 Tim. 5:25). In fact, elders are to be lovers of good (Titus 1:8). Such good works will eventually become known Paul teaches Timothy (1 Tim. 5:25), which has ramifications for how God is glorified through good works (see also Mt. 5:16).

²⁶³ Here we learn the good-work-producing-Christian is not his own product, but God’s; this change takes place in union with Christ; and one of the purposes for which God saves a person is to bring about good works in him, which means these good works are no small thing in the mind of God! We must also understand these good works lead to the praise of God’s glorious grace (1:4-6). These good works at least include some of what we find in the rest of the epistle of Ephesians: To make known the manifold wisdom of God to the spiritual world (3:10); dependence by faith upon the ongoing, transforming dwelling of Christ in the depth of our being (3:17); the conducting of our life in a way that measures up to the saving work of God in us (4:1); the pursuit of unity among the body (4:2-6); doctrinal fidelity (4:14-15); holiness and righteousness (4:17-24); the speaking of truth, refraining from anger, honest work along with helping those in need, edifying speech, kindness, and forgiveness toward one another (4:25-32); Christ-like love and holiness, doing that which is pleasing to God (5:1-17); being controlled by the Spirit (5:18); submitting to one another as is biblically appropriate (5:21); functioning in God-honoring, biblically-informed ways in our relationships of marriage, parenting (including training our children), and also work (5:22-6:9); and finally standing strong against the devil and his demons (6:10-18).

²⁶⁴ Colossians 1:9 teaches that we must be filled with the knowledge of the will of God with skill for application and Spirit-given insight that we might walk in good works.

²⁶⁵ We learn elsewhere that doing the work of evangelism (i.e. teaching and applying the gospel before and after conversion) is part of the work to which God calls His people, especially leaders (2 Tim. 4:5).

²⁶⁶ Elsewhere we learn we not only pray for each other but spur each other on to love and good works (Heb. 10:24), which is one reason we must not neglect to meet together (Heb. 10:25).

²⁶⁷ The work of the Lord in the context of 1 Cor. 15:58 at least includes: evangelism and discipleship (3:5-15), which includes the proclamation of God's Word (14:1-40); pursuing holiness (5:1-6:20; 8:1-10:33); pursuing God's design in sexual purity and marriage (7:1-40; 11:2-16); taking each other into account above self (10:26-33; 11:17-34); using spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Church (12:1-31); loving with biblical love (13:1-13); and giving to help those in need (16:1-4).

²⁶⁸ Many articles and books have influenced me through the years in my formation of this grid. However, I did not note them as I created it. The one influence that I can note is John Piper, *The Supremacy Of God In Preaching*.

²⁶⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting The Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 116. This is a wonderful resource, by the way, for helping a congregation shape their corporate worship by the gospel.