Section: Doctrine of Christ (Christology)

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q68. What is the gospel?**

The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God to redeem undeserving sinners to eternal life through Jesus’ perfect, sinless life; substitutional, sacrificial death; and victorious resurrection from the grave. These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone from the eternal wrath they deserved, and they are reconciled into an eternally secure relationship with God.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4** (NASB) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

**Romans 5:8** ... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**John 3:16** (YLT) for God did so love the world, that His Son—the only begotten—He gave, that every one who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life [everlasting].

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

**Colossians 1:13-14** (NASB) For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**1 Thessalonians 1:10** ... Jesus ... delivers us from the wrath to come.

**Intro.**

Evangelion [the word we translate as gospel] is a greek word , signifying good, merry, glad and joyful news that makes a man’s heart glad and makes him sing and leap for joy. ~William Tyndale

William Tyndale was so moved by this good news that he sacrificed his life and died a martyr’s death for making the Bible – and the good news it contains- available in the English language. He is just one of many well known and not known at all Christians throughout history who have joyfully given their lives for the sake of the gospel.

Not every Christian is given the opportunity to die as a martyr for the sake of Christ and His gospel, but every Christian who has heard and truly believed this gospel is committed to die for the sake of the gospel. That is the kind of good news this is! It is life altering news that completely transforms the lives of those who receive it.

Jesus compared the prize of the gospel to a pearl of such great price that a merchant who knew it’s worth went and sold everything he owned in order to have it. (Matt. 13)

The gospel is news of such great treasure that nothing else compares – there is no price too high to pay in order to have it – there is no sacrifice that wouldn’t be a joy to make in order to obtain it.

The Gospel is not just news that is good as opposed to being bad news. This is not the kind of good news that can even be compared with other good news.

You know how when you’re asked if you want the good news or the bad news first and you have to decide what the best order will be to soften the blow of the bad news. You might say “tell me the good news first” and they say, “the good news is that your car doesn’t need a new transmission – the bad news is that you need a whole new car.” Kind of cancels out the good news, right?

There is no bad news that can even diminish the good news of the Gospel. The gospel is good news that can never be trumped! The good news of the gospel is SO good for those who receive it that it doesn’t just make bad news tolerable, it actually takes bad news and gives us cause to rejoice in God’s work in it.

There is no way to take away from or add to this good news, you can’t make it any less good and you can’t make it any better!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the GREATEST news a person can ever be given and there is nothing we could add or take away from it that could possibly make it better.

The Gospel is THE good news. It is the ultimate good news. It is the ONLY good news you will EVER truly need.

We cannot add anything to the gospel to make it better news, but we can grow in our knowledge and understanding of the gospel. We can increase our ability to see more and more of its beautiful facets. The gospel message never changes but as we gaze into the beauty of the gospel and see its reflection being displayed throughout creation, we are changed and given a greater appreciation for its powerful and unchanging beauty.

The opposite is also true. The gospel cannot be trumped by any other good or bad news, but in our sin, we are capable of losing sight of all its beauty. I pray that the teaching tonight helps all of us to grow in our understanding and appreciation of the gospel that leads to a greater love for our savior, or if you have not believed the gospel that your eyes and ears would be opened so that you might repent and believe and be saved.

Let’s pray and then we’ll dig into our lesson.

PRAY

**What is the gospel?**

Look at our answer with me:

**The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God to redeem undeserving sinners to eternal life through Jesus’ perfect, sinless life; substitutional, sacrificial death; and victorious resurrection from the grave. These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone from the eternal wrath they deserved, and they are reconciled into an eternally secure relationship with God.**

It’s important that we understand and believe each point of our answer because not knowing and understanding each and every aspect of these truths weakens our understanding and love for the message of the gospel and, rejection of these truths ultimately results in a false gospel.

**The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God**

We cannot discount the centrality of grace as a major component of the gospel. We see this clearly in Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders in:

**Acts 20:24** But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

He summarizes the gospel as the good news of the grace of God.

There’s much more to say about the grace and power of God but we’re going to hit on that more in the second part of our answer. For now, I want to look at the rest of this first part. It goes on to say that “**The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God**

**…to redeem undeserving sinners to eternal life through Jesus’ perfect, sinless life**”

This good news is about God redeeming undeserving sinners. To redeem means to pay the debt for. It is when something or someone is bound by a debt they owe and cannot be unbound or set free until that debt is paid. The price of the redemption is in direct correlation to the value of the debt. So, when you take a diamond ring to a pawn shop in exchange for money, you are putting the ring up for ransom and incurring a debt in the form of interest. If they give you $100 for the ring it is going to cost you $100 plus interest. The longer you take to redeem the ring, to pay the debt that is owed, the more it will cost you in interest. The debt grows with time. Eventually the debt will grow to the point that the ring is worth less than the debt that is owed and it will be sold for its value making it impossible for you to redeem.

The debt owed by sinners is the penalty of their sin to a perfectly holy and just God. No one who is already in debt can pay the debt of another. The only way someone can pay another’s debt is if they have enough credit on their account to cover the debt. Only a perfect, sinless life can pay the debt of a life stained by sin. God’s standard of perfection is beyond our comprehension – let alone our ability to achieve it. The person who has only sinned one time in their life doesn’t even come close to being able to pay for the debt of someone who has sinned a million times. They are both sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. And when we consider along with that the fact that because of our inherited sin guilt from Adam - we are BORN corrupted by sin, full of hate towards the perfect God who created us.

Jesus alone was born without the guilt of Adam because of His virgin birth and He obeyed God perfectly through every temptation known to man.

**Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

For 33 years Jesus experienced all of what it means to be human living in a world corrupted by sin. Think about that in comparison to Adam’s sin. Adam was placed into a perfect world without sin and only had one law to obey and yet he failed. Jesus was born under the Old Covenant laws of Israel. All of the applicable moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws were perfectly obeyed by Him throughout His entire life.

**Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

The value and worth of Jesus and His perfection is infinite. He is perfectly lovely, without spot or stain or wrinkle. He had NO sin.

**2 Corinthians 5:21a For** our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin…

Part of the reason it is so difficult for us to comprehend the fullness of the beauty of Jesus’ perfection and sinlessness is that in our flesh we are still incapable of always seeing the hideousness of sin. We still struggle daily with the temptation to view sin as something of value to us. For us to fully appreciate the beauty and value of Jesus’ perfection and sinlessness we have to fully see the filthiness and ugliness of sin – of OUR sin.

The more we see and understand the filthiness and unworthiness of sinners, the more we will understand the magnitude of God’s love for us.

**Romans 5:8** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God’s redemption of these sinners is completely undeserved by them. It’s just one of the many reasons we call it Amazing Grace!

That tells us of the need for redemption and the price of redemption.

Next we’ll focus on the means of redemption, the way in which the redemption was paid. Our answer continues:

“**The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God to redeem undeserving sinners to eternal life through Jesus’ perfect, sinless life;**

**…substitutional, sacrificial death**”

Jesus’ perfect, sinless life made Him the only one who’s life was valuable enough to pay the ransom due sinners, but He also had to be willing to sacrifice it by substitutionally standing in the place of those sinners He came to save. If Jesus had committed a single sin, He would be required to die for His own sin and therefore couldn’t stand in the place of another and die for their sin.

Because Jesus death was substitutional, because He died in our place, we no longer owe the penalty for any of our sin. Our ongoing repentance for indwelling sin is not because we fear God’s wrath, it’s because we love Him and want to please Him by obeying all of His good commandments.

Jesus’ death was also sacrificial. To sacrifice means to give up something of value for the sake of another. Jesus’ perfect, sinless life meant that He had earned the reward of unhindered fellowship with God, never having to experience God’s wrath against sin, but Jesus sacrificed His life under the unimaginable wrath of God in order to redeem us. He tasted death under the wrath of God so that we could have the life He earned.

The 1689 London Baptist Confession states:

 The Lord Jesus most willingly undertook this office [of mediator].21  To discharge it, he was born under the law22 and perfectly fulfilled it. He also experienced the punishment that we deserved and that we should have endured and suffered.23  He was made sin and a curse for us.24  He  endured extremely heavy sorrows in his soul and extremely painful sufferings in his body.25  He was crucified and died and remained in a state of death, yet his body did not decay.26  On the third day he arose from the dead27 with the same body in which he suffered. ~ 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

Jesus did not sacrifice his life just to be an example for us or to make it a possibility that some might be saved. He died as a substitute in the place of the elect and actually paid the penalty for their sin. He truly paid the ransom. When He said “it is finished” He meant exactly that, that the work required of Him to redeem the elect was finished in His sacrifice on the cross.

Do you realize how good that news is? Our redemption has already been accomplished by the work of another - we don’t have to work for it ourselves. We’ve been set free to live with Him and for Him. And living for Him is not some kind of arrangement for us to pay Him back – it’s part of the gift we’ve received. We’re no longer slaves of sin but slaves of righteousness. To be free from sin is a gloriously good gift!

Next our answer says: **The gospel is the good news of the grace and power of God to redeem undeserving sinners to eternal life through Jesus’ perfect, sinless life; substitutional, sacrificial death;**

**…and victorious resurrection from the grave.**

We saw this a moment ago in the confession “On the third day he arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered.” ~ 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

Jesus victorious resurrection from the grave is an incredibly important part of the good news.

**1 Corinthians 15:17-22** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

**1 Corinthians 15:32** What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Without the resurrection, there is no good news in the gospel. If Christ had not raised from the dead, then there would not be eternal life for any of us. His victorious resurrection means our faith is not futile and our future in Christ is secure!

But, that does not mean we are separated from suffering before our glorification. No, to follow Christ in this life is guaranteed to come with suffering. We may not be thrown into an arena with beasts and we may never face a martyr’s death like William Tyndale, but we will face suffering for Christ’s sake.

**John 15:20** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master. ' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

The teachings of Jesus become nothing more than a burdensome waste of time if there is no resurrection from the dead.

**Matthew 6:19-20** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Again, the good news of the gospel enables us to see that Jesus is the greatest treasure we could ever want or have, and that everything in this fallen world is temporary. Because we know that He has risen from the dead and is now preparing a place for those who love Him, to be with Him after we die, everything we have in this life – good or bad – is rubbish in comparison to what we know awaits us. We are able to be thankful for every good gift we have in this life as a blessing to be enjoyed to the glory of God, and at the same time we also rejoice in our sufferings knowing that God is glorified when we endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

This is what Paul is saying in

**Philippians 1:21**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Jesus’ resurrection means that He completed His work to redeem His people. It is the evidence that God was satisfied with His sacrifice and that His wrath has been propitiated – meaning that Jesus satisfied God’s wrath due the elect based on His substitutionary atonement. God’s righteous anger towards those sinners who trust in Christ was poured out fully on to Christ, leaving them free from condemnation.

Let’s look at the next part of our answer. The first part of our answer speaks to what Jesus has done and how He has accomplished our redemption. This next part is about how his work is applied to those who believe. It says:

**These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone from the eternal wrath they deserved, and they are reconciled into an eternally secure relationship with God.**

These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Grace is defined as unmerited favor (or an undeserved gift) given by an unobligated giver.

The grace of God, like the love of God, and the wisdom of God, and so on, is an attribute of His perfection. It’s defined in the WOTC as an attribute like this:

Grace (As God’s attribute): Grace is a perfection of the divine character, which is exercised only toward the elect. Grace is distinguished from “mercy.” God gives unmerited grace to the guilty and unworthy that He has chosen. This includes blessings such as regeneration, faith, reconciliation, sanctification, and eternal life.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that because God IS grace that He must be gracious to everyone. The problem with that thinking is that it dismantles the meaning of grace by obligating Him to be gracious. There are many on the path to Hell, in complete rebellion against God, who believe God will forgive them in spite of the fact that they remain unrepentant, because they believe that if God is truly a gracious God, He will most certainly show them grace. They believe that God is obligated by His grace to show that grace equally to everyone.

If God is obligated for any reason to give grace, it is no longer grace. God is not obligated in any way to be gracious to anyone. God has every right to choose who, when, where, and how He wants to be gracious. Every enemy of God rightly deserves His eternal wrath and there is nothing ungracious about Him choosing to exercise His just wrath against them.

To even ask the question “why doesn’t God save everyone?” is to completely miss the magnitude of His grace in sending His only son to die for even one undeserving sinner. The only reason we could ask that question is if we think for some reason that all people deserve to be saved. NO one deserves to be saved! Not me, not you, not any one! When we truly understand the truth of that the only question that remains is “why does He save anyone?”, and the answer is “because of His glorious grace.”

Ephesians 1:6 says that all of what is accomplished by the gospel is done “to the praise of his glorious grace”. We will forever praise God for the glorious grace He has shown us in Christ.

Moving on it says:

We are saved BY grace THROUGH faith. Faith in the gospel is the Holy Spirit worked MEANS God uses to save us. Faith is the result of the gift of grace we have been given by God. When we are enabled by the power and will of God, we joyfully and willingly turn from sin and trust in Christ Jesus alone. This is saving faith.

Far too many have been brought up to believe that faith is some kind of mystical power that we exercise in order to make something come true. It’s the Disney version of faith. “If you just believe, you can make all your dreams come true.”

There are men and women calling themselves evangelists who have made millions pitching this lie to people, telling them that they can be healed if they just have enough faith. It’s such an easy way to skirt the accusation that they’re a fraud when no one is actually ever truly healed. All they have to say is that the person didn’t have enough faith. These men are peddling lies and so it doesn’t matter how much people believe them, it’s not going to make it true. The mere exercise of believing something doesn’t make it true.

That’s not how faith works. God has not commanded us to make something true for ourselves by believing it.

John Owen in his book The Death of Death says this:

*Christ did not die for any upon condition, if they believe; but he died for all God's elect, that they should believe, and believing have eternal life.*

*It is nowhere said in Scripture, nor can it be reasonably affirmed, that if we believe, Christ died for us, as though our believing should make that to be which otherwise was not, - the act create the object; but Christ died for us that we might believe. Salvation, indeed, is bestowed conditionally; but faith, which is the condition, is absolutely procured. ~ John Owen*

What he is saying is that repentance and belief is not something we do to cause God to act on our behalf. Rather, it is the product of what God has secured for us in Christ and brings about in us. When Owen says “that we might believe” he doesn’t mean “so maybe we’ll believe”. The proper way to understand that phrase would be “that the impossibility of us believing would be effectually overcome.” Christ’s death and resurrection has secured for us the salvation which the Holy Spirit has applied to us by opening our blind eyes to see in such a way that makes us believe.

Our faith is not in our faith. We don’t believe that we are saved merely because we believe -we are saved because of WHO we believe in. My faith doesn’t add anything to who He is or what He has done for me. By faith, I know that Jesus loves me and saved me by His life, death, and resurrection. Our faith is in Jesus alone – His life, death, and resurrection, along with every word He has spoken.

Next it says: **These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone**

**…from the eternal wrath they deserved**

**1 Thessalonians 1:10** …Jesus…delivers us from the wrath to come.

**Romans 5:9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

From eternal wrath! We’re saved from eternal wrath. There is nothing in this life, no matter how bad it might be, there is nothing in this life that compares to the terribleness of God’s eternal wrath. Not a bad financial investment, not sickness, not a miserable marriage or rebellious children, not even death. There is nothing in this short temporary life that we wouldn’t gladly endure to escape the eternal wrath of God, if we truly grasp its reality.

There are some who want to deny that it is God’s wrath we are saved from. The truth of God’s wrath is in contradiction to the idea that God loves everyone just the way they are. The truths of God’s holiness and justice require sinners to recognize that God is just in His wrath towards them in their sin and that it would be good and right of Him to condemn imperfect and unrepentant sinners to an eternity in Hell for that sin. But, that biblical message doesn’t sell, so they have to come up with something more appealing to be saved from. Usually they’ll say it’s Satan, and it’s true that that Jesus defeated Satan and the power of death on the cross, but we have to be careful not to think that means that we were ransomed from Satan– that the price of the ransom was paid to Satan. The grace of God is magnified in the fact that the one who is owed the ransom is the one who pays the ransom. It is all of grace. If we deny that it is God’s wrath we are saved from we make light of how much He has done to redeem us.

The fact that Jesus has saved us from God’s eternal wrath should be good enough news for us to gladly serve Him and worship Him for the rest of eternity, but that’s not all He’s done.

**These sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone from the eternal wrath they deserved,**

**…and they are reconciled into an eternally secure relationship with God.**

The reward of the gospel is often represented as an avoidance of hell, a chance to live forever, an opportunity to be reunited with loved ones, or the chance to be in heaven.

All of these are good and true results of the gospel, but they are not the ultimate reward and to paint them as such or to primarily focus on them is to undermine the supreme worth of Jesus and our restored relationship to God. God is the ultimate reward of the gospel. It is His good and just wrath that we are saved from and His blessed fellowship that we are saved to.

He didn’t just save us from the punishment of our sin, He has reconciled us to Himself as adopted children, co-heirs with Christ.

**Romans 8:16-17** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

**Ephesians 1:4-6** 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.

**1Peter 1:3-5** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Just one more…Listen to how Paul speaks in Eph. 2:4-7 and see how impossible it is to truly believe these words and not see them as good news! And then I want to come back to Jesus’ words to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2.

**Eph 2:4-7** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

We don’t ever want to minimize the gospel but if you were going to try to sum up the gospel in one word it would be: Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. It’s all because of Jesus. We get Jesus! This is the good news of the gospel!

**Application**

There is so much more that we could say about what the gospel is and when you look at all of the epistles in the New Testament and see how much these letters are spent speaking to Christians about what the gospel is, it’s clear that we never get beyond our need to be growing in our knowledge and understanding of the gospel. But now I want to shift from talking about what the gospel is and talk practically about some of the ways a misunderstanding and/or misapplication of the gospel can lead to diminishing the good news of the gospel by communicating something different than the true gospel.

There are a lot of issues around the world today but in particular here in the United States that are being touted by many churches as “gospel issues.” There are lots of efforts towards good works in the name of the gospel.

The problem is that when you mine down in to what they are really saying, you realize that they are basing their conclusions on a very flawed understanding of the gospel. Their definition of the gospel is either incomplete or just plain wrong.

The biggest reason these watered down, false gospels are promoted is because the true gospel is not seen as good news, or good enough news. They think they’ve figured out how to make it better. The people promoting false gospels think the message gets better when they add worldly elements to it such as, political reformation of our current society, “social justice, ”or health, wealth, and prosperity - and that it’s more appealing to sinners when you downplay or remove any mention of their sin (which is true, that a message without the truth of sin and wrath is more appealing to sinners—though for the wrong reasons).

I began by making the case that the gospel is good news, the greatest news that could ever be heard, but we didn’t talk about why, if that is true, do so many people reject it? Why do so many prefer a message that is actually not good news at all?

**1 Corinthians 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.

The good news of the gospel is only good news to those who are being saved by it. To those who are not being saved it is foolish. They are too in love with their sense of self-reign to see any good news in King Jesus reigning over them. They are too in love with their own thoughts and feelings to see any good news in being given a new mind and heart in accordance with Jesus’. They are too in love with their pride to see any good news in humbly admitting their unworthiness. **They are too in love with their sin to see any good news in the death of their sin.** We who are saved know this from experience because we too were once enemies of God, in love with our sin. If you are truly saved, it is because the Holy Spirit gave you a new heart and you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus alone, who He is and what He has done. You heard the gospel and believed. If that didn’t happen to you, you aren’t saved.

There is no other way of salvation. So how could we who have been saved by the power of the gospel ever deny it to those who still need it? Why would we try anything else? We know the true gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”! (Romans 1:16)

The reason we would is if we don’t fully trust the power and sufficiency of the gospel.

The temptation to run after other gospels is not a new phenomenon.

If you have your Bibles turn with me to Galatians 1:6-9

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

Paul is perplexed that the Galatian church is giving ear to a gospel of works after having been called to faith by the Holy Spirit by hearing the true gospel of Christ preached to them. There were men who had come into the church and were troubling the church by preaching that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses along with their faith in order to be saved. Paul writes to the entire church and calls them to take action against these men, particularly their false message of justification by works of the law. He goes so far as to tell them of a time where he even confronted the apostle Peter for tolerating and even participating in the distortion of the gospel. In chapter 2 verse 11 he says:

**Galatains 2:11-14** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Paul wants them to be as zealous in defending the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as he is. He said “even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

He wants their confidence to be in the gospel itself and not in anything or anyone else.

We have the same responsibility church. We need to be on guard against any kind of hypocrisy or distortion that would try to creep its way into the message of the gospel that we as the church have been called to proclaim.

The temptation to distort the gospel with a message of works can slip in very subtly. It can be distorted through word and/or deed. Even if we aren’t saying that you must add works to your faith, we can be guilty of distorting the message we proclaim by being hypocritical in the way we are behaving. We usually think of hypocrisy to our faith in the gospel as not obeying the law of God and it certainly is hypocritical to say we believe the gospel while disobeying God, but that is not the kind of hypocrisy Paul is talking about here. This hypocrisy is claiming to have been saved by the grace of God and then behaving in a way or saying that my obedience to God’s law also plays a role in my salvation.

Peter’s behavior in Antioch was leading to a division among the Jews and Gentiles that was antithetical to the fruit that comes from faith in the gospel.

When the work of the church (God’s people) moves away from the primary function of preaching the gospel and making disciples, to prioritize feeding the poor, or eliminating sickness, or fighting earthly injustice, or any other earthy goal as the main focus of the church, we are basically saying that we don’t really believe the good news is good enough or that it is sufficient to call sinners to repentance and salvation. What they really need is something more practical, something that those who are still dead in their sin see as good. Maybe if Christians line up their priorities with the worlds, they will eventually discover that Christianity is great.

Hear me, it’s not that feeding the poor, or curing diseases, or seeking justice, or any of the other things that God calls good aren’t all things that we should be doing as followers of Christ. But we need to do them AS followers of Christ, according to how He taught us to do it and has instructed to in His word. If we are doing those things in a way that suggests that the gospel is not sufficient or good news without them, then we are not giving the world what it truly needs the most (the message about Jesus) or doing our good works out of Holy Spirit-powered, *gospel-motived*, faith-fueled effort.

Consider for a moment what Jesus said to the Pharisees in

**Matthew 23:25-26** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self- indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

He’s not saying that the outside of the cup doesn’t matter, he’s saying that it’s not really clean if the inside is still dirty. It’s just a façade, it might look good, but you don’t want to drink from it. The priority is the inside of the cup – FIRST clean the inside of the cup, SO THAT the outside may also be clean. Your heart needs to be cleaned.

The power of the gospel is that it changes our hearts.

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus teaches that there are two main ways that people reject the gospel. In the story, a father who represents God has two sons who are heirs to all of his wealth. The younger son is rebellious and wants to have his share of the inheritance now so that he can go live life as he sees fit. He has no love for his father and in asking for his inheritance before his father dies, he is basically saying “I wish you were dead.” This son wants his idols, not relationship with the father.

The older son remains with the father and continues to be an obedient worker, but at the end of the story, after the younger son returns broken and repentant for how he has sinned, it is revealed that the older brother did not love his father either. He is resentful of his father’s mercy and claims that he has earned the right to his father’s stuff because of his work and obedience. His obedience was not motivated by love for his father, but by love for what he thought he could get by serving him, whether it was wealth, power, or status. This son shows that his relationship with the father was ultimately also because he wants his idols, over the father.

The point is that dutiful obedience doesn’t produce the same fruit as heartfelt obedience. The fruit of the older sons dutiful obedience was resentment, anger, and pride. He was completely blind to the good news that his brother who had been lost was now found, he was dead and was now alive!

Each son represented a different way of rejecting the gospel. The younger represents the attitude of licentiousness – living as if there is no law- and therefore nothing to be saved from. Where there is no law, there is no law broken.

The older son represents the attitude of legalism – or works-based religion – the idea that one can earn their salvation by doing good deeds.

When we talk about being gospel centered, we’re not talking about something in the center of the spectrum between licentiousness (or outright rejection of the law) and legalism (or obeying the law as a way to merit salvation). What we mean by gospel centered is that we are completely captivated and fixed on Jesus and who He is and what He has done as proclaimed in the good news of the gospel. And because He has removed the curse of the law from upon us we no longer view God’s law as something restrictive that we would rather be free of. Rather, we rejoice that we are free to follow Him and obey His good commands.

Our obedience is a product of the gospel’s work in our hearts.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We need to have a right understanding of good works and how they function in the life of a believer.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith says:

“good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruit and evidence of a true and living faith.3  Through good works believers express their thankfulness,4 strengthen their assurance,5 build up their brothers and sisters, adorn the profession of the gospel,6 stop the mouths of opponents, and glorify God.7  Believers are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,8 so that they bear fruit leading to holiness and have the outcome, eternal life”.9 ~1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

Good works are those things we do in obedience to God’s commandments. If an action is in violation to even one of God’s applicable commandments it’s not a good work.

One of the things that happens when we develop a wrong understanding of good works is that we begin to lower the standards of what God classifies as good. It’s easy to begin to think that haters of God are capable of good because we see what we believe to be the most critical component of what makes something good being done by them, whether that’s feeding the poor, caring for the sick, or fighting injustice in the world. We elevate the importance of the good things that the world agrees are good and we downplay or even disregard any of the other commandments that God calls good. In this way of thinking it makes sense to compromise on some of God’s commandments that the world finds offensive in order to accomplish at least some of the commandments that God calls good.

So, let’s get really practical here for a minute. Our country is being split wide open right now over claims of systemic racism. For the purpose of keeping the point I want to make as clear as possible, let’s set aside whether you believe the claim is valid or not. It makes no difference for this discussion. God’s word makes it clear that He hates ethnic prejudice (aka racism - which, as an aside - even the word racism is a term that promotes ethnic prejudice by insinuating that people of different ethnic backgrounds are not part of the one human race, descended from the same two parents Adam and Eve.) and He commands and calls Christians to value all human beings as image bearers of God. So we can and should absolutely agree with the statement “black lives matter” because God’s word is clear that all lives matter. But when a political organization called “Black Lives Matter” promote a solution to ethnic prejudice (aka racism), by dividing people into different groups based on their ethnicity, skin color, or ancestry and then uses those standards to either assign guilt or exonerate guilt of individuals based on what group they belong to, then we must reject those ideologies as unbiblical and ungodly. We must draw a distinction between the phrase itself and the ideologies it represents. It’s good to promote the welfare of individuals and groups in accordance to God’s word, but it is no longer good when it is being done in a way that violates God’s commandments against partiality, favoritism, division, hatred, and pride (to mention a few).

BLM claims that they want to eradicate all traces of racism in America and that is not a bad goal. The problem is that they reject the true source of racism as the corruption of sin within the heart of every human born of Adam’s race.

The world view of those still dead in their sin is that people are inherently good, or at least that humans are born with the capacity to do good. But that is not the testimony of God’s word.

**Mark 10:18** And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

**Romans 7:18** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

The message that humans are inherently sinful and that nothing they do is good is not a message they can or will accept. The gospel is good news because it gives us the answer to the question all people want to know (or think they want to know), “what’s wrong with the world?” The rejection of the truth that the problem with the world is sin is a rejection of the gospel. There is no good news about God’s solution to sin if we don’t see that sin is our greatest problem.

And when the truth that sin is humanities greatest problem is rejected, the only thing left to do is accept and respond to alternative answers to the question. And those answers are all man-centered, they see man as the ultimate victim of what’s wrong with the world. So the solutions are all man-centered as well. The most important goal is to respond to the injustices against man.

In this broken ideology, there is no joy in knowing that there is a solution to the problem and consequences of my own sin. No, I cannot be happy unless the evil (what I perceive to be evil) *of others* is dealt with. My greatest problem is seen as the evil done against me (or against those I think are victims) by others. In this, I, (and others I determine) are victims, and the only way to fix my problem is to bring everyone else to justice (justice according to MY standards). This sense of justice is accomplished when they repent and stop offending me or others or when they have been punished and forcefully prohibited from offending me or others. It’s not about God’s justice and seeing Him as the offended party from sin. It leaves no room to rejoice in the grace of God that has fulfilled His perfect justice by condemning His own son to die for my sin.

If we truly believe that the gospel is the solution to humanities greatest problem, we will not get sidetracked from the great commission by trying to fix the world through political protests or getting our unsaved neighbors to change their political views, or even their moral views. That is ultimately a very self-serving motive. My motivation is not actually what’s best in God’s eyes, it’s what’s best in my eyes. If I can get everyone to just get along the world will be a much better place. My motive is ultimately about making this life a more pleasant experience according to my own fleshly desires. I don’t want to experience all the ways that sin is being played out in this world and if people are going to reject the gospel as the ultimate solution, then maybe it’s better to offer an alternative that they might be willing to accept.

Americans have experienced an incredible amount of common grace by living in a country where we have an abundance of just laws and freedoms (some would argue too many). Not all of our laws are just, but many of the ones that are have been good at curbing human suffering, but at the end of the day, all the laws in the world cannot change the human heart, no matter how well they are enforced. Only the gospel can transform the human heart and cause people to genuinely love their neighbor.

Racism (or biblically classed: hatred, partiality, and pride) is an evil that comes from the heart of sinful man. The only thing that can fix the heart of sinful man is the transforming power of the gospel.

It is good to have laws that protect fellow image bearers of God from injustice stemming from ethnic prejudice, but there is no human law that can stop a person from hate. A person who hates is already violating the law of God that is written on their heart. Adding a human law against hate might add consequences that curb the expression of that hate in certain ways, but it won’t change the heart. The gospel transforms the heart to not just stop hating my brother, but to genuinely love him and seek his welfare. Not just his temporary welfare, his eternal welfare. If I prioritize fixing his temporary circumstances before addressing his greatest need, I am affirming his belief that what matters most is addressing the way that sin is offending him. I am not loving him if I don’t take every opportunity I am given to help him see the Good News of the gospel! Again, if I think that I can make the good news better by adding another layer to it – by saying that it will fix your temporary circumstances – or that it will make this decaying world a better place, I am not believing that the gospel is THE Good News.

Our hope as Christians is not in this life. This is why Paul said in the 1st **Corinthians 15 passage**

that “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Because we are not living our best life now, we are taking up our cross daily, dying to ourselves, denying ourselves so that we can live for Him and His purposes, not our own.

We know that we are sojourners and that our hope is in heaven. We have committed our lives to follow Jesus, who came to earth and lived a perfect life, he committed no sin and yet he was treated more unjustly than any human being who ever has or ever will live. Jesus’ life death and resurrection compels us to live our lives for Him, enduring whatever hardships we might face in this life as an act of worship – to glorify Him.

**Philippians 1:21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

So no matter what we experience here on this earth, in this life, the good news of the gospel causes us to endure it all for the hope of the glory set before us, just as our savior did to secure that hope for us. We live with the knowledge that we are eternally secure with Him and that we will not experience the fullness of what that is to be until we die. When we truly live for Christ in this way our lives bear witness to the truth of the gospel message we proclaim.