

This morning I am beginning a new series entitled “The Practical Gospel.” The idea for this series comes from what Paul said in *Philippians 2:12-13*, where he told the Philippians to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” In other words, now that you have been saved, now that you have believed the gospel, and now that God is working in you through His Holy Spirit, who you received when you put your faith in Jesus, work out the implications of the gospel into every area of your life as God works in you. Not “work for your salvation” but “work out the implications of your salvation.” My goal in this series is to examine what the implications are of the gospel for various areas of our life – love life, parenting, work, money, friends, church, personal growth, and the world.

The gospel summary statement I will be using in this series is this: “**We are sinners who have been saved and justified by grace, learning to live as new creations according to God’s will, trusting in a certain and glorious eternal hope and future.**”

If you read that statement closely, you will recognize that it has a past, present, and future dimension. Today, we are going to use those three aspects as our framework and examine what the implications of the gospel are for your love life.

- **We are sinners who have been saved and justified by grace.**

We are sinners means that we are all rebels against a holy God, separated from Him and staring at an eternity of separation from God and all that is good. And we are so full of wickedness that we can not save ourselves by our own good deeds, can not make ourselves right with God on our own. But the good news is that Jesus lived the perfect life we could not live and died a sacrificial death on the cross in our place, to take the punishment we deserve, to save us from the penalty of our sins, and to restore us to a right relationship with God. To be justified means that we are declared not guilty before a holy God. And this is all a gift of God’s grace, an undeserved gift given by an unobligated giver.

*Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Work out your salvation does not mean work for your salvation; as Ephesians 2 tells us, no amount of good works could ever save us. We have been saved and justified by the grace of God. This humbles us into realizing we are no better than anyone else, and it lifts us up to realize just how loved we are. We are **justified**, declared not guilty, perfect in the sight of God, not because of anything we did, but

because of what Jesus did for us. There is no condemnation and nothing can separate us from the love of God. We know we are worth so much to God that He would send His son to die for us. **The more the gospel shapes our identity, how does this affect our love life?**

Three implications.

- 1) **Our self-worth is not tied to our performance, our spouse's evaluation of us, or even to whether or not we are married.** Some of you really need to hear this today. Maybe you don't even think about it. But for so many people, their self-worth is tied to how they are doing as a husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, or whether they have a significant other or not. One word of criticism and we can be devastated. When I was younger, this was everything. I was so afraid of rejection. Even as a believer, I can struggle with this. But the more I believe the gospel, the more that is the fundamental thing in my heart, the more I know that no matter how I do as a spouse, no matter what my partner thinks of me, and no matter if I'm single or married, I am loved, I am valuable, I am worth the life of Jesus to God.

***Romans 5:6-8** - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

We are loved so much that when we were at our worst, Jesus died for us. There is NO condemnation. NOTHING can separate us from His love. If God is for us, WHO can be against us? When understood correctly, this brings a humble confidence. **This does NOT mean that we should have a proud, arrogant, "I don't care what you think" attitude, because the gospel tells me that I am a sinner in need of a Savior.** So, if I fall short, if I fail, it doesn't change my judgment of myself. I already know I am a sinner in need of a Savior. But Christ loved me enough to die for me when I was at my worst. And so, I know I have great self-worth, and one that is not tied to my performance or the evaluation of others, but to my God.

- 2) Secondly, it means that **we can live honestly, because we do not fear our partner's judgment or rejection.** Think of the plot of basically every romantic comedy. Girl meets boy. Girl and boy fall in love. But girl has a terrible secret that if boy found out, she fears boy would reject her. Finally, boy

finds out secret. Rejection seems to be the outcome. But wait! He accepts her and loves her despite her secret! What does that plot say about the longing of our heart? It is that someone would see the deepest, ugliest parts of us and instead of rejecting us, love us as we are. The gospel is just that – the God who knows you better than you know yourself, from whom you can hide nothing, saw all your sin and ugliness and instead of rejecting and condemning you, chose to die for you. And when that is our identity, we find the courage to take steps towards honest living, knowing that even if our partner rejects us or condemns us, the one who loves us perfectly chose to die for us and make us beautiful.

- 3) Lastly, the gospel means that **we show our partner grace as a fellow sinner in need of a savior**, instead of expecting them to be perfect or perform up to our standard. The gospel declares that we are so wicked that it took the death of the Son of God to save us. So how can we stand in judgment on our spouse, elevating ourselves above them as some sort of morally superior person? We are sinners in need of a Savior, and God did not treat us as our sins deserved, but gave us the undeserved gift of forgiveness and grace. In the same way, when we understand the gospel, one implication is that we have the humility to allow our spouse or partner to be a sinner, and we show them grace as God in Christ showed us grace. Think of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18.

*Matthew 18:32-33 - "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'*

- **We are learning to live as new creations according to God's will.**

When we repent and come to faith in Jesus, God gives us His Holy Spirit. We have a new heart, a new spirit, a new hope, a new family, a new future. We have new desires. We are being renewed in our minds. We begin to learn how to live according to God's will, according to the values of the kingdom.

*Galatians 5:19-25 - The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,*

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things **there is no law.** <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

What are the implications of this for our love lives?

- 1) **Our goal is not self-centered pleasure, but to love and serve others as Christ loves and serves us.** This world is about using each other for our own pleasure, and that may be great in the short run but is a miserable way to live and makes for a miserable and dangerous world. Best understanding of God's purpose for our love life is in Eph 5:21-33 -

***Ephesians 5:21-33** - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself **as a radiant church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the **two will become one flesh.**" <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. Wives, submit to your husband. That's the picture. Instead of the tug of war for power, it's a desire to serve and submit. Notice that the husband gives himself up for her to "make her holy", NOT to "make her happy." The goal of God's love for us is to sanctify us, to make us holy, like Christ, not to make us happy. In the same way, the goal in serving each other is to make them holy, not happy.

- 2) **The purpose of marriage is to point to Jesus' love for the church.** The image of a husband and wife is to point to Jesus' love for us. **The main purpose is not our happiness, nor is it even to have children, but to image Jesus' love for His people and His people's love for Jesus.** That is a high calling, but it

has many implications. It's not primarily about your happiness. **Fidelity and perseverance matters.**

- 3) **We treat men and women as brothers and sisters in Christ**, with all holiness, not as potential mates. Instinctively men can group women in two categories – women I would date and women I would not. But the gospel shows us a better way to treat each other.

**1 Timothy 5:1-2** - *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup> older **women** as **mothers**, and younger **women** as **sisters**, with absolute purity.*

- **We trust in a certain and glorious eternal hope and future.**

We know that this life is not all that there is. We will live forever with God. Love will never end, and death will be conquered. And all that our heart truly desires will one day be ours. We will spend eternity with God, in a place beyond comprehension. One of the images used most often in reference to the second coming is the image of a wedding:

**Revelation 21:2-5, 9-10** - *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a **bride** beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things **has passed away...**" <sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the **bride**, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.*

The people of God are described collectively (not individually) as the bride of Christ, and on the last day, as we come into eternity, it is described as a wedding with a wedding feast. What does this all mean?

The first clue to what it means comes from Matthew 22. In this chapter, a group of religious leaders called the Sadducees, who did not believe in life after death, ask Jesus a question in hopes of exposing how ridiculous views on the afterlife are:

**Matthew 22:24-28** - Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. <sup>25</sup> Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup> The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> Finally, the woman died. <sup>28</sup> Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

Interesting question, which I'm sure people have thought of. **If I've been married a couple of times, how awkward is that going to be in heaven?** Am I going to be a polygamist in heaven? **And if heaven contains all good things, will there be sex in heaven?** Let's look at how Jesus responds to the Sadducees:

**Matthew 22:29-30** - Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. <sup>30</sup> At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

Notice how Jesus responds. In heaven, there will be no marriage. There will be no sex. They will not be necessary. **Jesus responds by saying that if you think there is marriage in heaven, you don't understand the Scriptures or the power of God – you don't realize that there is something greater in store.**

I believe this means that if you are married, you and your wife will no longer be husband and wife in heaven; the long-lost reunion with your departed spouse that is so popular in culture may not be exactly as you envision in your head when you arrive in heaven. Not that you won't be reunited, but Jesus is saying that the joy of marital oneness that you experience on earth will be nothing compared to what you will be experiencing in eternity, in the presence of God. That's worth considering for a second. **As great as marriage, companionship, sex, and raising children can be on earth, Jesus says that you won't even be thinking about those things once you are in the presence of God, because there's something there that will be so much greater than even the best married life here on earth.**

CS Lewis put it this way, when asked about sex in heaven: *"I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer, "No," he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate; he does not know*

*the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it.”*

As we've already seen in Ephesians 5:21-33, marriage is meant to point to the greater reality of Jesus' love for us. At the end of time, the writer of Revelation describes eternity as a wedding, the coming together of the bridegroom, Jesus, and his bride, the church. **Out of all the possible imagery that could have been used to describe heaven, God chose a wedding, the beginning of an eternal union.** By using this language, the writer of Revelation is communicating that eternity will be the perfect union between God and his people, where we enter into His eternal love, security, and joy forever. Our time in the new heavens and new earth are going to be one long celebration of this love and union.

We have a certain and glorious eternal hope and future. What are the implications for us?

- 1) **Marriage is not the ultimate love, so those who are single should consider remaining single.** The Bible is high on singleness.

*1 Corinthians 7:32-35 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-- how he can please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-- how he can please his wife-- <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world-- how she can **please her husband.** <sup>35</sup> I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

- 2) **Our spouse is not our Savior, nor do we have to be our spouse's Savior.** We can allow each other to be human. Someone once asked me if my wife was jealous of my love for Jesus, because she was not my top priority. One of the greatest gifts you can give your partner is to put Christ first. Let Him be the Savior. Put the burden on Him of being your perfect love. And let your partner be human.
- 3) **Jesus is the only perfect love, so resist the temptation to look for it in any human.** The grass is not always greener, and marriage is not the ultimate love. We can stay committed, knowing that Jesus is the only one who truly

fulfills us. And if we feel stuck in a loveless marriage, we can still have in Jesus the greatest love of all.

Let me close with these words from Jonathan Edwards:

*“God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”*