

We are in the fifth week of a sermon series I've entitled "The Practical Gospel," learning to put into practice 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.*" Now that you have been saved, now that you have believed the gospel, work out the implications of the gospel into every area of your life as God works in you. Not "work for your salvation," because we are saved by the grace of God and not by anything we have done, but rather "work out the implications of your salvation." In other words, think through how the gospel shapes the different aspects of your life and allow God's transformative power to do its work?

The gospel summary statement I will be using this series: "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 **personal growth**.

**It will help this morning if you can think about where you are trying to grow in your character.** Maybe you are overcoming addictions, habits, or challenges, such as overeating, drinking, spending beyond your means, or lust. Maybe you are trying to overcome fears and anxieties – failure, conflict, being alone, giving up control, giving up freedom. Or maybe you are just trying to grow into maturity – becoming a more responsible husband, mature parent, or stable individual.

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

We are sinners means that we are separated from a holy God, so full of wickedness that we can not save ourselves by our own good deeds. But we have been saved and justified by grace. The second part means that God loves us so much that His Son, Jesus, died for us, to rescue us from our sins. **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.

*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.*

The more the gospel shapes our identity, how does this affect our personal growth?

- 1) Our self-worth does not depend upon our performance, but has been firmly established by Jesus' death for us

This Mickey Mantle card sold for \$12.6 million dollars over the summer. Why is it worth so much? The condition? The player? How rare it was? Ultimately, its value was determined by how much someone was willing to pay for it. Where does your value, your worth come from? Your worth comes from what God was willing to pay for you – He was willing to give His Son to save you and reconcile you.

**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.*

Our self-worth does not depend upon our performance, but has been firmly established by Jesus' death for us. **This is everything when it comes to personal growth.** When you have put your trust in Jesus and His death for you, it means your worth has been firmly established. The verdict is in. You are so loved that the Son of God willingly gave His life for you when you were His enemy. Your self-worth does not depend upon whether or not you are overcoming your addiction, or living up to the goals you have set for yourself, or overcoming your anxieties, or any other measure of performance. Listen to how Paul put it:

**Romans 3:20-24** - *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

What makes us right? What makes us worthy? Not how we are performing, but faith in Jesus Christ. We all fall short of our standards and God's standards, but by His grace, we are justified and redeemed. And so, we say along with Paul:

*Romans 8:1-2 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

**Why is this so critical?** What happens when you locate your self-worth in your performance? You will either end up in pride because of how well you are doing, or despair because of how poorly you are doing. You will either think highly of yourself because others puff you up, or lowly of yourself because others think you're doing such a terrible job. I know that when I have fallen short of my own standards, or the standards of others, I have to remind myself of the gospel, and thank God that I am perfect in His sight, that I am not judged on the basis of my performance. Do you know how much of your life is controlled by fear or pride? The gospel sets us free. There is a better way.

**2) The gospel frees us from justifying ourselves so that we can be honest about our need for improvement**

Without the gospel, without knowing that God has justified me despite my sin, I need to convince myself I'm a good person. I need to justify myself. I need to set the bar at a level low enough that I can clear it, so that I will not despair at my wickedness. But the gospel shows me the truth. I have fallen short of God's glory.

*Matthew 5:48 - Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Even the best parts of me are stained with sin and self-centeredness. I am so far from the person that I could be. Because of the gospel, **I can be completely honest about who I am and my shortcomings and sinful tendencies.** I know I'm a sinner who needs a Savior. I'm much worse off than I dare to admit, and at the same time I am more loved than I could ever dare believe. And so I know that I need God's help, and I need to work harder, and I also need the help of other people: accountability, counseling, mentors, support groups, community.

If I'm truly going to grow, I need to be painfully honest with myself about just how far I am from the person I could be. And I need to allow others to be painfully honest with me. I need to be able to receive the criticism of others. But if I need to justify myself, then how can I be that honest? If I can not live with being a failure, with falling short, how can I admit just how wicked I am? But if I believe the gospel, then I know that my self-worth is not a matter of performance, but has been firmly established by Jesus's death for me. And so I can pray along with the Psalmist:

*Psalm 139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

### 3) God's grace motivates us towards godliness

Listen to how Paul put it:

*Titus 2:11-14 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

God's grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness? It's not fear of punishment, or guilt, or the envy of others that gives us the motivation to live for God and reject sin. It's God's grace! How is this so? The more you are honest with yourself, the more you see the gap between who you are and what God requires, between the person you are and the person you long to be. And the more clearly you see that gap and your inability to close that gap in your own strength, the more you realize the magnitude of His grace and love and what Jesus did for you. He lived the perfect life you could not live. He died on the cross in your place to save and justify you and to make you perfect in God's sight. What does that do to your heart? It makes you want to bring honor and glory to the one who gave His life for us. It gives you a genuine motivation to know God and to be like Jesus, to reject those things that will bring you and others death. The gospel not only saves us but gives us the proper motivation for personal growth. The more clearly we see God's grace, the more we are motivated towards godliness, and the more we will become the people God has created us to be.

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

When we repent and come to faith in Jesus, God adopts us into His family and 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. What are the implications of this for our personal growth?

## 1) The Spirit gives us a desire is to be like Jesus

Whatever we once lived for, once we have His Holy Spirit, we no longer have the same desire for what we once lived for. Now, our desire is to know and be like Jesus Christ:

**Philippians 3:7-12** - *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

This does not mean our desire is always for Him. We know that the Spirit is at war with our sinful nature, which desires everything except Jesus. But as we learn to live as new creations, our desire becomes more and more to be like Jesus. We devote ourselves more and more to prayer, knowing that this is where we find Him, where we get to know Him, where we find the power to overcome our sin and addictions and be transformed.

**2 Corinthians 3:17-18** - *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we, who with **unveiled faces** all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

## 2) We look for the idol under every sin and replace them with Jesus

As our desire to know and be like Jesus grows, we also realize that our sin is right there with us.

**Romans 7:18-23** - *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. <sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: When I want to do*

*good, evil is right there with me.* <sup>22</sup> *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;* <sup>23</sup> *but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*

We may have His Spirit and a new desire, but the old nature and the old desires are still there competing for our attention. And trying harder isn't going to be enough. What are we to do? In our struggle against sin, we need to recognize that underneath every sin – lust, pride, gluttony, sloth, violence, etc. – there is an idol (or more). Instead of worshiping and living for God, our hearts are worshiping and living for something of this world. Power. Freedom. Comfort. Image. Sex. Freedom. Children. Work. Something other than God has become more important to us, and we are looking to that for our ultimate hope, our salvation. You have placed your hope in something else.

Here's the key - under every behavioral sin is the sin of idolatry, and underneath every idolatry is disbelief of the gospel. There is something that you do not believe about God and the gospel that causes you to look elsewhere for your security, significance, peace, or joy. Our lack of change is due to our inability to look to Christ for our joy and righteousness.

There is something about the gospel, something about God, that you are disbelieving in your heart, and trying harder just isn't the answer. **As Thomas Chalmers put it: "No one changes a habit just by trying – 'oh, I shouldn't be like that.' The only way to dispossess an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new affection."** In order to root out an idol, we need to be captivated more and more by the love of God.

**What will move your heart away from the idol?** You have to replace them by learning to rejoice in the particular thing that Jesus brings that replaces the particular idol of your heart.

Is it depression? Meditate on the joy found in the gospel.

Is it fear of what others think? Remember that if God is for us, who can be against us?

Is it addiction? Love and desire to know Him and desire Him above all other things.

Finding pleasure in the world? Life to the fullest is found in Him

Anxiety? God will care for me. He will give me all I need. His love is all I need.

Memorize the gospel. Preach the gospel to yourself. As Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, “have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?” Pray the gospel. Sing the gospel. Listen to others proclaim the gospel.

### 3) We encourage others to speak the truth in love to us

*Ephesians 4:15 - Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

We need each other. We are blind to so much about ourselves. If we believe the gospel, we will invite others to speak the truth in love to us. We do not grow by reading books by ourself. We grow in community with other people who point out the truth, who remind us of the truth, who encourage us to become the person God has called us to be.

*Proverbs 27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

We need each other. There are people in this church who have been married many years. People who have been divorced who can tell you what they did right and wrong. People with grown children. People who have overcome addictions. People farther along in their faith. Whose wisdom are you drawing upon? How are you leaning on others to help you grow?

**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, 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. What does this mean for our personal growth?

### 1) We trust that God will complete the good work He has begun in us

*Philippians 1:3-6 - I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Praise God that even if we make no real progress in this life, when we are with Him, he will make us perfect. In the meantime, humbly admit your need for help, and replace the idols in your life with worship and love of God.