

# The Gospel Exchange: From Label to Life

Pastor Anthony J. Shetley – Sunday, March 8, 2026

Today I want to talk about something I'm calling "The Gospel Exchange: From Label to Life." Because in our culture today, there are many people who carry the label *Christian*...but the gospel was never meant to be a label we wear. It was meant to be a life that transforms us.

## The Godless Culture (Romans 1)

There is a culture in our world that openly rejects God.

Paul describes it in **Romans chapter 1**. He says that what can be known about God is evident. Creation itself bears witness. The invisible things of God are clearly seen through what has been made — His eternal power and divine nature.

In other words, God has not left Himself without a witness.

But Paul says something tragic happened. People **knew about God**, but they did not honor Him as God. Instead, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. They made gods in their own image — gods that approved of their desires, gods that justified their behavior, gods that never confronted their sin. And because they **did not want to retain God in their knowledge**, God gave them over to their own desires.

Paul then lists the result — a culture filled with every kind of unrighteousness, immorality, envy, pride, deceit, and rebellion against God. That is the **godless culture**. A culture that refuses the evidence of God. (**Romans 1:26–31**)

## The Religious Culture (Romans 2–3)

After describing the godless culture, Paul speaks of another group. The **religious culture**.

These are people who believe in God. They accept the Scriptures. They acknowledge moral truth. But Paul says something very sobering. Even with the law... even with knowledge... their hearts were unchanged.

The Jews had the law of God, yet they still stood guilty before God because the law exposed sin but could not remove it.

So, Paul concludes - "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3)

Both groups — the **godless** and the **religious** — stand in the same place before God - Lost. The problem is not simply ignorance. The problem is the **human heart**.

That is why people say things like, "*God knows my heart.*" And the truth is — **He does.** But that is not always comforting. Because the Bible tells us that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. This is why God calls us to **repentance**.

## God's Heart Toward Us

Here is the beautiful truth. Even though our hearts were turned away from Him... **God's heart was turned toward us.** The Bible says that **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

- When we rejected Him, He still loved us.
- When we ran from Him, He pursued us.
- When we chose sin, He chose the cross.

Why?

Because God desires **reconciliation**. He desires that we know Him. He desires that our hearts be transformed. He desires to cleanse us, forgive us, and fill our lives with the life that comes from heaven.

This is the **gospel!** The power of the gospel is not merely that it informs the mind. The power of the gospel is that it **transforms the heart**.

### **The Label vs. The Life**

Now this brings us to something very important. In our culture today, many people carry a **label**. The label is *Christian*. But something interesting is found in the Gospels. Jesus never used that label.

In fact, the word **Christian** was first used by the culture in Antioch to describe believers. But when Jesus spoke about His people, He used another word. He called them **disciples**. And disciple is not a label. It is a **description**.

A disciple is someone who **follows**. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." — **Luke 9:23**

A disciple exchanges their life for His.

### **The Greatest Exchange**

The first exchange was made by Christ. He gave **His life for ours**. But when we surrender to Him,

We exchange:

- **Our sin for His righteousness**
  - **Our guilt for His forgiveness**
  - **Our darkness for His light**
  - **Our bondage for His freedom**
  - **Our death for His life**
- What we lose is nothing compared to what we gain. We surrender a broken life...and receive **abundant life**.
  - We surrender temporary pleasure...and receive **eternal joy**.

Paul said in Romans 12: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice."

In other words, when you see what Christ has done for you, the only reasonable response is to give your life completely to Him.

### **Closing**

A label cannot save you. Knowledge alone cannot save you. Religion cannot save you.

Only a **transformed heart through Jesus Christ**.

The question is not: *Do you wear the label?*

The question is: **Have you made the exchange?**

**It's time to move from label... to life?**