



WEEK 7

IDENTITY

THE GOSPEL



LESSON 7 - THE GOSPEL

Christ as our Salvation, Sanctification, and Glorification

“The cross is the great jewel of the Christian faith, and like every great jewel it has many facets and each are worthy of examining for their brilliance and beauty.” - Mark Driscoll¹

Spring 2013

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The heart of the Christian faith is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is simple enough for a child to understand and marvelous enough to engage scholars for a lifetime. It can be stated simply: Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected. It can be explained with profound eloquence as throughout the whole book of Romans. It is our only message, our whole life, and our only hope. It is worthy of your life's devotion, for how can we give less than everything to one who has given us everything. Christ spared no expense for you and because it is by grace alone it demands a response that is no less than everything. God's love has been most clearly demonstrated in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and victory over death and this is why we love him.

SCRIPTURE

Read and Reflect on the following passage: Romans 5-8

REFLECTIONS

What is the gospel?

How does Christ's death and resurrection relate to our growth in holiness?

What is end result for those who believe in the gospel?

From what idols or sins has God saved you?

How have you responded to his unconditional grace and love?

PRAYER

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:1–11, ESV)

PRACTICE

The gospel is about God’s unmerited grace to us. It is about faith in the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is only in Jesus Christ and not in our own righteousness. It is a gift of sheer grace from God alone that we receive through faith. Jesus has given his all for us in his death and so we, by faith, must give him everything. There is nothing that we can withhold from him because there is nothing we did to earn it. Paul says in Col. 1:10 that he prays for them “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,” in light of their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is about living in light of the gospel where our life is being continually conformed to the likeness of Christ by the Spirit as we repent and increase in faith. It is about putting off the old you, marked by your sin, so that you can live out your new identity in Christ because of his amazing grace. There is therefore no aspect of our life that should not be affected by the all encompassing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Salvation Through Jesus Christ

DWELL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Article III:F Regeneration

We believe that all people are sinners by nature and by choice and are, therefore, under condemnation. We believe that those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We believe that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God’s power and are thus secure in Christ forever.

The Christian doctrine of salvation is rich with many different components and effects. It starts with the work of the Triune God bringing salvation to sinful humanity and moving

towards the restoration of all creation. Here we will discuss the significance of Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. Then we will discuss the Holy Spirit's calling and regeneration of sinners, their justification and sanctification. It is then proper we can speak of the Father's election and adoption. While all of salvation is a work of God we are responsible for how we respond to his work. Thus it is necessary to discuss faith, repentance, and baptism. Lest one think they are saved by mere confession, we will cover the fruits of salvation which are the tangible evidences of true Christian faith. But the one piece of the puzzle that runs through them all, is the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, came down and took on flesh, becoming a slave and was obedient to death, even death on the cross. It is for this reason that God exalted him as the name above all names.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION, ATONEMENT, AND RESURRECTION

God has always worked by grace. The Old Testament only contained hints to the fuller revelation of the gospel in the New Testament. He has always been the God who condescends, who comes down for us. The climax is the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, in the flesh. The incarnation of Christ is a mystery equal to that of the Trinity. However, it only makes sense in light of the Trinity in which the Father sent the Son, the Son obeyed and gave his life, the Spirit empowered the Son and the Father raised him by the Spirit from the dead in victory.

Just as the Trinity is necessary for Christian salvation, so is the incarnation of Christ. Only a perfect God could provide a perfect sacrifice. Only someone who is fully human could serve as a representative and substitute for the whole of humanity. It is only the one person of Jesus Christ who has two natures, fully God and fully man. This means Jesus is human and divine at the same time (Jn 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16). He remains to this day fully human and divine but in his resurrected glorified body at the right hand of the Father ruling over the universe and interceding for us (Eph. 1:19-21). Jesus is not an enlightened human being who ascended to divine status because of his obedience (adoptionism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Deepak Chopra, New Age). Jesus is not a divine being who only appeared to be human while on earth (doceticism, Hinduism's Avatars, Gnosticism). Jesus is not one person with one nature where the divine and human natures are fused together. Nor was one nature superior to the other, or that he is two person with two natures as if Christ had a split personality (apolinarism, monophysites, Nestorians). The two natures were united together in one person, what is called the hypostatic union. This does not diminish or confuse the distinctions between the two. Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, remained fully divine (Col 2:9) and took on the full qualities of humanness (Is 49:1-13; Phil 2:6-7). He took on the nature of a servant not considering equality with God something to be grasped or hoarded. He added humanity to his divinity by leaving his heavenly position and the constant use of his divine powers during his earthly ministry. His was a self-limitation of the use of his divine abilities

in accord with the Father's will and Holy Spirit's leading (Jn 5:19; Is 61:1-3; Mt 4:1). Jesus was always fully divine and human throughout his work and life and continues to be so today sitting in his glorified state at the "right hand" of the Father (Acts 7:55). He was also more human than we are, since in him the image of God was perfectly manifested.

There are a variety of metaphors in scripture for the work of salvation but the common thread in them all is the *penal substitutionary atonement* for our sins (Is. 53:5; Rom. 4:25; 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:13; 1 Jn. 2:2). The *penal* refers to death as the penalty for sin. Luther explains *substitutionary* well, saying that we substituted ourselves for God and God substituted himself for us. *Atonement* is Jesus giving his life *for us*, on our behalf. Sin results in death and therefore, blood must be shed to atone for sin. He redeemed what it means to be human through the atonement making a new life with God and others possible.

The essence of the gospel is Christ's work on the cross that is expressed in a multitude of ways and perhaps it is limitless. Jesus is our *propitiation*. He serves to satisfy the wrath of God toward human sinfulness (Rom. 3:21-26; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10) and do not need to punish ourselves. Christ is our *new covenant sacrifice*, fulfilling all the Old Testament sacrifices making them obsolete (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-15; 9:26; 10:10). We do not need to offer anymore sacrifices, and to do so is to not trust in the complete sacrifice of Christ. Jesus is our *justification* who takes the penalty for our sin. God remains just by punishing sin on the cross and justifies us through Christ's righteousness in the sight of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:16-17; Titus 3:7).²

There is nothing you can do to earn God's acceptance of you; you are accepted in Christ by grace alone through faith alone. Jesus is our *righteousness* (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:21). This is not a self-righteousness rooted in one's pride, but rather a trust in Christ's righteousness imputed to you by God's grace. Jesus is our *ransom* (Mk 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:5). His life served as a ransom to pay the debt we owed and could never pay. You cannot pay God back for there is no longer any debt left to pay for those who are in Christ. Jesus is our *redemption* (Is. 61; Lk. 1:68). He frees us from the bonds of sin (Ex. 6:6; Rom. 6:6-12). We cannot free ourselves from our own works or striving or good habits. We are freed by Christ's redeeming work alone. Jesus is our *Christus Victor* (Lk. 4:18; Col. 2:13-15; 1 Pet. 3:22). This was a favorite aspect of the atonement by the early church describing how Christ has delivered us from the forces of evil and demonic powers. Satan, demons, and any evil force in the world no longer has any authority over you. Christ alone is King and he has all authority over all powers. Jesus is our *expiation* (Lev. 16:30; Jer. 33:8; Zech. 13:1; 1 Jn. 1:7-9). Jesus' work cleanses us and washes us pure from the defiling affects of sin, especially sins committed against us. Jesus atonement takes our unrighteousness and makes us righteous, making us pure and presenting us as perfect before the Father. He removes all our shame and we no longer need to fear God or people by living life trying to hide our deepest and darkest secrets. We no longer need fig leaves or other useless ways of trying to cover up our sin. Lastly, Jesus is our ulti-

mate *example* (1 Pet. 2:20-24). Christ's perfect and obedient life to the Father redeems all aspects of human life. Because of his atoning sacrifice, he can be our example. He shows us how to respond to suffering for he redeems it. He can turn joy from our mourning and bring glory to God through our biggest messes. We can respond like Jesus because of what he has done. Ultimately, the atonement shows God's incomparable and overwhelming love (Rom. 5:8; Jn. 15:13; 1 Jn. 4:9-10). He reconciles us to God that we may be adopted as sons and daughters of the loving Father who gave up His only Son for us, that we may enjoy life in Him forever as he always intended (Is. 59:2; Hos. 5:6).

The resurrection of Jesus proves his victory and accomplishes our salvation. The resurrection is our hope that death will not have the final word and the world will not remain broken forever (Rom. 8). Jesus is our resurrection (Jn. 11:25-26). His glorified body is the first-fruits of the glory to come (1 Cor. 15:20). Jesus was not merely revived but resurrected into a new glorified body. He was fully dead. He was not a reincarnated body as a result of having perfect karma. Jesus was the same person in an incorruptible body, not just another body. The resurrection is the source of our ultimate hope. Our hope is not life after death, but as NT Wright says, our hope is life after life after death.³ Our is a hope based on historical facts and evidence. Many witnessed Christ's resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:1-15). The empty tomb, guarded by some of the best professional killers the world has known, shows his resurrection was miraculous. Jesus' resurrection was prophesied and he predicted it (Is. 53:8-12; Mt. 12:38-40). Jesus' resurrected body was truly physical, evidenced by him eating food and Thomas touching his side (Jn. 20:20-28). One of the biggest evidences that the resurrection was real is that the early church, full of mostly Jewish converts abandoned worshipping on Saturdays to Sundays, the day of the resurrection.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK OF REGENERATION, SANCTIFICATION, AND GLORIFICATION

It ought to be clear to us that Jesus Christ alone is the one who saves humans from their sinfulness, redeeming the whole person which affects the whole of creation (Rom 8:19-22; Is 66:22-24; Acts 4:10; Col 1:15-20; Rev 21:5). Salvation comes by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and not by works (Rom 1:16; 3:22-26; Eph 2:8-9). Humans are saved to live by the Holy Spirit as Jesus did and demonstrate true faith by their fruit (Jn 15:5; Rom 8:1-4; Eph 2:10; Jam 2:24). Salvation by the gospel is the work of the triune God. The Father effectually calls people to faith through the work of the Son to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Mt 16:17; Rom 6:8-10; 8:9; Tit 3:5). But there are different angles which this is understood as to what happens when a person first believes.

The moment a person becomes a Christian is viewed through the acts of conversion and regeneration. Conversion is, from the human perspective, a person coming to faith in the

gospel of Jesus Christ, in a moment or over a period of time (Ez 18:30-32; Acts 2:38). Regeneration is from the perspective of God when the Holy Spirit renews a person's heart for faith and repentance (Jn 3:5-8; 1 Cor 2:6-16). The work of regeneration gives us faith and thus new desires to long for the things of God and to hate sin. This sets us on a destiny of salvation which begins with reconciliation to God, then being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, and eventual glorification in a resurrected body (1 Cor 15:42-53; Rev 20:4). Part of the debates between different schools of thought within orthodox Christianity is whether conversion or regeneration is prior - does a person believe and then regenerated or does God regenerate and then they convert? The spectrum runs from five point Calvinism (regeneration prior) to moderate Calvinism or "Calminianism" (a mediating view) to Arminianism (conversion prior). This debate refers to what is called the *ordo salutis*, or the logical order of salvation (Rom. 8:29-30).

The indwelling Holy Spirit is evidence of true conversion and real regeneration and this begins the process of sanctification. Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Spirit to conform us to the likeness of Christ through continual repentance and faith in the gospel by putting sin to death and putting on the righteousness of Christ by living in the Spirit (Col. 3:1-17; Rom. 8:1-11; Gal. 5:16-26). This is the destiny of the Christian (Rom. 8:29-30). God will do his sanctifying work in us with our cooperation or not (Jam. 1:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:3-9). But it is imperative we work hard to be dependent on God to grow (2 Pet. 1:3-11). The presence of the Spirit in one's life shows that they have been united with Christ in what theologians call the *mystical union with Christ* (Rom. 3:21-28; 6:1-14; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; 2:6-15). The regenerated believer is united to Christ and adopted into the family of God (Rom 3:21-28; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9; Rom 8:15-17). We are united relationally to Christ through the Spirit and not in an essential way that we become a "part" of Christ. The Spirit enables us to live in righteousness to God and no longer be under the curse of sin or in legalistic pursuit of the law. This sanctifying work of the Spirit with a person shows that they are righteous by doing good works (Jam 2:24) and not works of the law (Rom 3:28). The process of sanctification is complete upon death as the Christian goes to be present with the Lord and awaits their glorification with the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 8:30; 1 Jn. 3:1-3).

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GOSPEL

I hope to make it clear that faith in the gospel is not only the means for regeneration but also for sanctification. Having just discussed the objective aspects of salvation as a work of God, now we will move on to our responsibility to the gospel, or the subjective aspects of salvation from a human perspective. The essential components of salvation from a human perspective is repentance and faith, that is the response to the call of the gospel is repentance and faith. Repentance and faith are the essential fruits of conversion, and continue to be essential for further sanctification and growth into Christian maturity. While salvation is

by God's grace alone who is sovereign in all things, we have a responsibility to accept or reject the gospel and live by faith in accordance with it. Repentance is an active turning away from sin and is marked by godly sorrow (2 Chron 7:14; Mt 3:2; 2 Cor 7:10; Jam 4:7-10). Repentance is not feeling bad about your sins (2 Cor. 7:10). It is changing your behavior. Faith is belief in Jesus that is characterized by changed behavior (Gen 15:6; Jam 2:14-26). Faith is not a mere intellectual confession that you believe God exists or that Jesus died and was risen. Faith is also an orientation of the heart to trust in God's objective work and his ongoing work to bring about salvation. It is the means by which we grow in our knowledge of God. What matters is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, and not the quantity or quality of it. Repentance and faith are the means God has given us to put to death the old life and live by the Spirit (Rom 6:1-11; Gal 5:16-23). It is dying to self and living for Christ. True salvation impacts the whole person. It is not merely intellectual or emotional or behavioral. It is our whole self and the renewal of the image of God in humanity. While some may experience miraculous healing and other miracles these are merely a foretaste of the fullness of salvation to come with the resurrection of our bodies.

There are two responses to the gospel that should be avoided and are the most insipid. The first is legalism. The book of Galatians, as well as much of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees, speaks directly to this problem. The simple premise of legalism is that God accepts or blesses those who obey. Obedience is prior to any act of grace. The problem is that it results in arrogance and self-righteousness if one is successful and despair and believing one is cursed by God if unsuccessful. The problem is that it takes away from the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ's atonement. The second false response and opposite error, is belief that God's forgiveness does not result in obedience. This is called *antinomianism*, which is a fancy word for "anti-law" (*nomos* is the Greek word for law). Romans 6 and 1 John speaks directly to this. Paul's argument is that we have been united with Christ and therefore must be holy and live righteously. If we continue in sin we show that he is not in us. Belief in Christ as one's savior means belief that our sin has been put to death and therefore we should stop sinning. The struggle with these two false responses to the gospel is that people have a hard time distinguishing between matters of culture or individual conscience, and matters of morality that apply universally. Legalism wants to require cultural or individual preferences as morally necessary for faithful Christian belief and practice. Antinomianism wants to live a life free of moral obligation to anyone or anything and considers everything a matter of culture and individual preference. One considers the atonement insufficient, the other, ineffective.

The New Testament contains multiple "warnings" for people regarding their salvation. It speaks of people who leave the faith (1 Jn. 2:19; Heb. 6:4). All of these are to reveal whether one has truly trusted in Christ or whether they have misunderstood it as legalism or lawless-

ness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer popularized the notion of “cheap grace.”⁴ The gospel is costly grace for the price was the blood of the Son of God. God’s unconditional grace paradoxically produces an unsayable debt for the gift of salvation. It ought to produce someone who carries the cross. Jesus said that “you will know them by their fruits.” (Matt. 7:20). James is forceful that saving faith is accompanied by works of mercy (Jam. 2:14-26).

What are the evidences of salvation then? First, the indwelling Spirit is the first sign and at times accompanied by miraculous utterances in Acts (cf. Acts 10:44-48). This is not to be confused with what pentecostals call a “second baptism of the Spirit.” Scripture is clear, if you believe in the gospel the Spirit comes on you and you are saved. Hence, a person is saved if the Spirit continues to do transforming work in their lives evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18-24). Second, both James 2:14-26 and 1 John 3:16-18 says that if a person who confesses belief but does not care about the poor, especially poor Christians in our churches, is not a Christian. Thirdly, repentance is a fruit of salvation and ongoing stubbornness of one’s sin and a refusal to repent necessitates treating them like an unbeliever (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13). They need to be loved and have the gospel explained to them. Fourth, over the course of one’s life, a Christian will endure suffering and will not deny the faith. Christians cannot lose a salvation they did not earn though over the course of one’s life they may have doubts and struggles for a time but eventually the Spirit will enable them to persevere (Jn. 10:10; Eph. 1:13; Rom. 8:31-39; 1 Pet. 4:12-19). Some will deny the faith in the midst of suffering never to return and will prove they were never really Christians in the first place (1 Jn. 2:19). Fifth, a Christian who forgives others demonstrates true faith (Matt. 18:21-35). Unforgiveness is inconsistent with being a Christian. Bitterness must be purged (Jam. 3:1-18). Sixth, habitual sin is inconsistent with being a Christian (1 Jn. 3:4-10). Sanctification and the fruit of the Spirit are naturally a long process. Someone may struggle for years with the same sin but they will not live without pursuing growth, without conviction, without some improvement in other areas. Lastly, love of the brethren is the mark of a true Christian (1 Jn. 2:10-11). You cannot say you are a Christian and hate the church or hate Christians. In the end, the clearest evidence is growing in the fruit of the Spirit, being more patient, more kind, more loving, more gentle, more joyful, peaceful, faithful, and having more self-control but as Jonathan Edwards points out in his classic work on this subject, *Religious Affections*, the fruit of the Spirit grows symmetrically and in proportion to each other. Meaning, true growth in any one area is always accompanied by corresponding growth in other areas. We all can be patient in our flesh under certain circumstances but if it is not also accompanied by gentleness, faithfulness, love, joy, peace, etc it is a patience of the flesh not of the Spirit.

It should be noted that several things that have been discussed in this section reflect a reformed view of salvation, or a moderate Calvinist view. There are a few things that other

orthodox Christians would disagree with. One does not have to prescribe to these to be a part of our church. I am trying to be upfront about my personal theological commitments.

But lets take a brief look at the subject of predestination that bothers so many. Scripture is unanimous that God elects people for salvation (Dt. 7:6-11; Rom. 9-11). Often the doctrine of predestination or election comes under a discussion of God's sovereignty. This is not the way scripture treats the subject (or John Calvin for that matter). Scripture discusses election *after* the nature of salvation has been discussed. This functions to humble us and guard us from self-righteousness or a sense of superiority (Deut. 7:6-11; 9:1-12; Rom. 1-8; 9-11). It functions to encourage us in God's ability to ensure he will finish what he began (Phil. 1:6). It is something that can only be understood in hindsight of God's saving work. Sometimes a new Christian often instinctively says not that "I found God," but that "God found me." The difference between Ariminianism and Calvinism is whether God elects individuals whom he knew beforehand or whether he elects a class of people who he foresaw would choose him. This difference is due to how each understands free will, whether it is libertarian (Ariminian) or compatibilistic (moderate Calvinist).⁵ Additionally, some hard Calvinists (five point Calvinism) believe in double predestination meaning God choses who will go to heaven and who will go to hell before the fall (supralapsarianism). This is an attempt to simplify the debate about who Christ died for, was it merely the elect or for the whole world?⁶ It is better to stay closer to the center of scripture and conclude Christ died for all but only some (the elect) will receive it. In this sense, God actively elects individuals to salvation (Eph 1:4-5) through Israel and the Church and but passively allows others to choose condemnation (Ex 9:12; Rom 1:18). This is single predestination.

FURTHER RESOURCES

The Cross of Christ - John Stott

¹ The quote comes from Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 253. However, Mark Driscoll originally took the idea from Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 2:407.

² *Doctrine*, 261.

³ N.T. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 30-31.

⁴ Its noteworthy he learned about cheap vs. costly grace while attending a Black church in Harlem when he stayed in the US for a few years.

⁵ This is a large topic in itself. I merely am introducing the terms to you for further study if you desire.

⁶ It is interesting that super analytical guys who have a very strong sense of their utter sinfulness commonly hold this view.