

Christian Leadership Training

Christ Presbyterian Church, New Haven

2025-26

1 | Gospel-centered Spirituality

THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING

Where we're going today

1. Foundations of the Gospel
2. Humility of the Gospel Applied to Community
3. Boldness of the Gospel Applied to Evangelism

1 | Foundations of the Gospel

See Total Christ class 1 on what it means to be Gospel-centered

Gal. 2:1-21

- Why was Peter's behavior "*not in step with the truth of the gospel*" (v.14)?
- v.20 summarizes the new perspective of every Christian - we live, but our life is not our own!

From Keller's "The Centrality of the Gospel"

- **The Gospel applied to the individual who's discouraged** - "When a person is depressed, the moralist says, "you are breaking the rules--repent." On the other hand, the relativist says, "you just need to love and accept yourself". But (assuming there is no physiological base of the depression!) the gospel leads us to examine ourselves and say: "something in my life has become more important than God, a pseudo-savior, a form of works-righteousness". The gospel leads us to repentance, but not to merely setting our will against superficialities. It is without the gospel that superficialities will be addressed instead of the heart. The moralist will work on behavior and the relativist will work on the emotions themselves."
- **The Gospel applied to the community** - "**Approach to the poor.** *The liberal/pragmatist* tend to scorn the religion of the poor and see them as helpless victims needing expertise. This is born out of a disbelief in God's common grace or special grace to all. Ironically, the secular mindset also disbelieves in sin, and thus anyone who is poor must be oppressed, a helpless victim. The *conservative/moralists* on the

other hand tend to scorn the poor as failures and weaklings. They see them as somehow to blame for their situation. But the **gospel** leads us to be: a) humble, without moral superiority knowing you were "spiritually bankrupt" but saved by Christ's free generosity, and b) gracious, not worried too much about "deservingness", since you didn't deserve Christ's grace, c) respectful of believing poor Christians as brothers and sisters from whom to learn. The gospel alone can bring "knowledge workers" into a sense of humble respect for and solidarity with the poor."

Freedom AND Service in the Christian

Martin Luther, from "Freedom of a Christian"

- **Freedom** - *"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all subject to none."* (From 1Cor. 9.19)
 - "Every Christian is **by faith so exalted** above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. . . . The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression. This means nothing else than that "power is made perfect in weakness" [II Cor. 12:9] and that in all things I can find profit toward salvation [Rom. 8:28], so that the cross and death itself are **compelled to serve me** and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since **faith alone** suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians."
- **Service** - *"A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."* (From 1Cor. 9.19)
 - "Faith is truly active through love (Gal. 5.6), that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith....We should devote all our works to the welfare of others, since each has **such abundant riches in his faith** that all his other works and his whole life are a **surplus** with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor. . . . Hence, as our Heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should

become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians. . . .

A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor.

Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself in God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor."

- **In theological terms, God justifies** "by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God." (WCF 14.1) And "the principal acts of saving faith are **accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone** for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace." (WCF 14.2) **God sanctifies** as "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." (WSC 35)
 - Technically we are saved *through* faith, not *by* faith. Why?
 - Christ didn't just give us a "chance" at salvation, he purchased salvation for us on the cross, which we receive as a gift. For the same reason, Paul can say "I have been crucified with Christ." (Gal. 2.20)
 - See "What We Believe" class for more on justification and sanctification
- **Notice how this revolutionizes everything!**
 - Our identity, motivation, heart, what we love, what we practice, hope to do, etc. etc. etc.

2 | HUMILITY; or, The Gospel Freeing Us to Confession of Sin and Creating Communities of Vulnerability

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from *Life Together*

“‘Confess your faults one to another’ (Jas. 5.16). **He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.** It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The “pious” fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

“But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now **come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you.** He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone. ‘My son, give me thine heart’ (Prov. 23.26). God has come to you to save the sinner. Be glad! This message is liberation through truth. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; **you can dare to be a sinner.** Thank God for that; He loves the sinner but He hates the sin.

“Christ became our Brother in the flesh in order that we might believe in him. In him the love of God came to the sinner. Through him men could be sinners and only so could they be helped. **All sham was ended in the presence of Christ.** The misery of the sinner and the mercy of God – this was the truth of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. It was in this truth that his Church was to live.” (110-111)

“Is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary.”

- What are ways that we tend to reinforce the lies of the “pious fellowship”?
- Can you think of examples when you’ve experienced the grace of “daring to be a sinner”? What are ways our church could encourage those experiences more?

Curt Thompson on the Power of Community to Overcome Shame

from *The Soul of Shame*

How we Hide -

- “we cloak ourselves with invisibility to prevent further intensification of the emotion. . . . we are only as sick as the secrets we keep. And shame is committed to keeping us sick.” (31)
- “Turning away, while temporarily protecting and relieving us from our feeling, **ironically simultaneously reinforces the very shame** we are attempting to avoid. . . this dance between hiding and feeling shame itself becomes a tightening of the noose. We feel shame, and then feel shame for feeling shame. It begets itself.” (31)

How we Heal

- **“Exposure is the very thing that shame requires for healing** . . . shame’s healing encompasses the counterintuitive act of turning toward what we are most terrified of. . . . it is in the movement toward another, toward connection with someone who is safe, that we come to know life and freedom from this prison.” (34-5)
- “We do not execute shame quickly via some behavioral guillotine, but rather we starve it over time, not by avoiding it but by attuning to it as a component of a larger story.” (36)
 - Though it’s so hard! - “Being open to relational vulnerability cuts against the grain of all we have been programmed to do”
- **Being Known and loved by God** - “We can love God, love ourselves or love others only to the degree that we are known by God and known by others. To be fully loved—and to fully love—**requires that we are fully known**. Absolute joy comes not just in my having some random joyful engagement with something or someone. Rather, absolute joy must eventually include my being completely known, especially those parts that in subtle, hidden ways have carried shame, often without my conscious awareness. This is the language of the new heaven and new earth. This is the work that God alone has initiated and in which he longs for us to join him. For God longs to be known by us as much as he longs for us to be known by him.”
- **Through the Church** - “It is equally true that in order for me to be liberated from the shame I carry, I need someone to be able to say to me, ‘You’re right. You were wrong to have done this.’ I need to hear that my behavior was really as bad as I think, if not worse, while simultaneously sensing that the person I am confessing to is **not leaving**. . . . We must be able to acknowledge the reality of the pain inflicted if

forgiveness is to be real, and if the offender's shame is to be effectively healed."

How we hope to accomplish this now at CPC:

- Worship service - especially confession of sin; honest preaching that is aware of our shame; the Lord's Supper as Jesus himself coming as near to us as possible, even inside our bodies!
- Life Groups
- Pastoral Counseling
- Friendships in the church

How can we seek to accomplish these goals *more and better*?

3 | **BOLDNESS; or, the Gospel Applied to Apologetics - This News Must be Shared!**

Framing: The gospel grants us great courage to simply listen, be patient, and ask questions even in the face of intense disagreement and conflict. No sin should surprise us and no sinner is too far gone to listen to. Nothing we have done we deserve. The gospel also changes everything, and we are secure in Christ with a radically sure foundation, so we can boldly share what Christ has done in us.

1. **Overall Theological Framework**

1. **Reasons for there ALWAYS being common ground**

1. **God** - Ps. 139 - omnipresent

1. Rom. 1 - Everyone has access to Him and should worship Him.
 1. Sin is not “uniquely creative” but a “negative distortion” of God and/or God’s good purposes. Therefore, there always remains a piece of goodness in a person’s “noble dream” or purpose
2. All truth is God’s truth

2. **Creation**

1. Purpose given by God and for God’s glory
2. All humanity is in the image of God - incredible dignity for all

2. **Reasons for there ALWAYS being common ground that’s not perfect ground**

1. **Sin** - everyone needs Jesus and every culture needs supernatural redemption.

1. No culture is more privileged to receive the gospel and yet no culture is unable to relate to some biblical teaching
2. In other words, in this life you are never in heaven or hell.
3. NOTE: Don’t confuse *common* ground with *neutral* ground. There is always common ground, but NEVER neutral ground. In other words, every person/culture has made some claim (whether conscious or not) about God. You are either an unrepentant sinner, or repentant Christian.

2. **Both Sympathy & Criticism (think: elect exile or resident alien)**

1. **Being a Sympathetic Insider - Because the world is good (but not heaven)**

1. Knowing the other person/culture well enough to know its longings and noble dreams.
 1. If you want to understand a religion, you must try to feel and sense what questions they are asking. What are the fundamental longings?

2. Knowing and listening to the other - "When Paul began to speak to the philosophers in Athens, he began by saying he had carefully studied their objects of worship (Acts 17:23). We should do the same." - Keller
3. **"A Beliefs" - Where the Gospel Agrees**
 1. "When we enter a culture, we should be looking for two kinds of beliefs. The first are what I call 'A' beliefs, which are beliefs people already hold that, because of God's common grace, roughly correspond to some parts of biblical teaching." - Keller
 2. We enter the culture by pointing people to the overlapping beliefs they can easily affirm: Do you see this in your culture? Do you see this well-known belief? The Bible says the same thing—even more strongly, even more clearly!
2. **Being a Critical Outsider - Because the world is evil (but not hell)**
 1. **Seeing where it's not enough** - Our task is to hear the cry of the heart and say, we believe your beliefs will never answer this but Christ is the only answer.
 1. Beginning with the common heart longings will enable you to invite them further into a discussion about Christianity. "If you believe 'A' about God—and you are right—how can you believe in 'B'?"
 2. **"B Beliefs" - Defeaters** are "... beliefs of the culture that lead listeners to find some Christian doctrines implausible or overtly offensive. 'B' beliefs contradict Christian truth directly at points we may call 'B' doctrines..."
 1. "In Manhattan, what the Bible says about turning the other cheek is welcome (an 'A' belief), but what it says about sexuality is resisted (a 'B' belief). In the Middle East, we see the opposite—turning the other cheek seems unjust and impractical, but biblical prohibitions on sexuality make sense." - Keller
3. **"A" belief <==> "B" belief**
 1. **A: Tolerance is commendable**
 1. **B: Exclusive truth is judgmental and wrong**
 1. Re-engage with tolerance: What is tolerance? Why is it commendable? Is it different than love?
 2. Christian love ends up achieving what "tolerance" is after in more powerful and clear ways because we love even those we disagree

with. So the “exclusive truth” of Christianity ends up providing a better foundation for tolerance than anything else.

2. B: Sex is for marriage, and marriage is only for a man and woman

1. A: *Freedom is a good desire, sex is good, and God is not a killjoy*

1. Common ground can be built with desires for freedom from oppression and desires for pleasure..... but explore what exactly freedom and pleasure mean. Freedom from what? Is consent enough to make something ethical? Who defines what is good or oppressive?

3. Consider the “Social Liturgies” of our World

1. Just as everybody worships someone/ thing, every person and culture has a “liturgy” or movement that images their gods or salvation. Consider the assumptions of certain social traditions or structures, and what they say about what the culture values, loves, and worships.
2. “I don’t *think* my way into consumerism. Rather, I’m covertly conscripted into a way of life because I have been *formed* by cultural practices that are nothing less than secular liturgies. My loves have been automated by rituals I didn’t even realize were liturgies. These tangible, visceral, repeated practices carry a story about human flourishing that we learn in unconscious ways.” - JKA Smith, *You are What You Love*
 1. “We become what we worship because what we worship is what we love. . . . Christian worship is essentially a *counterreformation* to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings, miscalibrating them, orienting us to rival versions of the good life.” (25)
3. Two Examples:
 1. SEC Football Game - what are the rituals? idols? common languages? vestments? sins?
 2. Shopping Mall - how is it arranged? what values are taught? what is worshipped? what is sin and salvation?

4. Don’t forget the ultimate goal of this engagement - not just opinion change, but conversion

1. We’re trying to “take the roof off” of a non-Christian view by exposing the false assumptions or false worldviews that are inherent somewhere.

2. We shouldn't be surprised by the **long, slow work** that involves a lot of questions and patient listening. We're hoping for total heart change, for a radical re-orientation that goes from "I am my own" (with its million implications) to "I am NOT my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."
3. "Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant breaker. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so. It is the one point that cannot bear mention in his presence. A man may have internal cancer. Yet it may be the one point he will not have one speak of in his presence. He will grant that he is not feeling well. He will accept any sort of medication so long as it does not pretend to be given in answer to a cancer diagnosis. Will a good doctor cater to him on this matter? Certainly not. He will tell his patient that he has the promise of life, but promise of life on one condition, that is, of an immediate internal operation. . . . He is so much in contact with the truth that much of his energy is spent in the vain effort to hide this fact from himself. His efforts to hide this fact from himself are bound to be self-frustrative." - Cornelius van Til, *Christian Apologetics*

PRAY

* *Consider this month:*

- How you can grow in hatred for your sin that produces real humility?
- How you can grow in boldness that stems from Jesus' accomplished salvation?
- How can you allow the sweetness of the gospel to flow more deeply in your heart?
- Two practical things to do in light of this session

**Read for next month:*

1. Keller's "The Missional Church"
2. Newbigin's "The Logic of Mission" and "Mission: Word, Deed, and New Being", ch. 10-11 from *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*
3. Ch. 1 of Michael Goheen's *A Light to the Nations*
4. Christianity Today's "The Juvenilization of American Christianity"