

CPC Adult Sunday Studies
 Fall 2025
 Total Christ: The Full Vision for His Church
 1 | Gospel-Centered

Gospel-Centered

Key Text: Romans 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

See devotional “Abiding in Total Christ” for more key passages.

What is the Gospel?

"Gospel" is literally from the Greek, "good news". What does that fact alone tell us of what the gospel is and is not?

It's news of what God has done to accomplish salvation through Jesus Christ in history, so it contrasts with “religion.”

- the gospel is "I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey"
 - religion is "I obey, therefore I am accepted"
- the gospel is the way we meet God *and* grow in Him, dispelling fear, pride, etc.
 - religion engenders fear, pride, etc.
- the gospel is the reversal of the weak and strong
 - religion substantiates the world's weak and strong

In classic Christian theology **justification** refers to the once-and-for-all legal action by which God accepts us because of the work of Jesus Christ, while **sanctification** refers to gradual growth in holy character and behavior.

- To reverse the gospel, to “base your justification on your sanctification,” means that we assume God’s love and acceptance of us is based on the

quality of our behavior and the purity of our hearts. We obey God's law out of a fear of rejection and out of a desire to create a good self-image through our moral efforts.

- However, to "base your sanctification on your justification" (the right way!) is to assume God's love and acceptance of us is secured in Christ, and then to obey God's law out of a desire to delight, resemble, and know him.

The **unique self-image** that the gospel brings us is that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope — at the very same time.

- When you "base your justification on your sanctification," (which is wrong!) you can be either bold and confident or humble and self-effacing depending on whether you are living up to your own standards or not.
- But if you are "basing your sanctification on your justification," (which is right!) then you can be both confident and humble — bold and sweetly sensitive — at the same time.

Being "religious" and being "irreligious" have the same root - "Without a knowledge of our extreme sin, the payment of the cross seems trivial and does not electrify or transform. But without a knowledge of Christ's completely satisfying life and death, the knowledge of sin would crush us or move us to deny and repress it. Take away either the knowledge of **sin** or the knowledge of **grace** and people's lives are not changed. They will be crushed by the moral law or run from it angrily. So the gospel is not that we go from being irreligious to being religious, but that we realize that our reasons for both our religiosity and our irreligiosity were essentially the same and essentially wrong. We were **seeking to be our own Saviors** and thereby keeping control of our own life. When we trust in Christ as our Redeemer, we turn from trusting either self-determination or self-denial for our salvation, from either moralism or hedonism." - Tim Keller

Note: "Gospel-centered" is not one among other values that our church has, as if you can list it along others; rather, it's the hub of the whole wheel, it should impact everything we do. In this class we'll never stop discussing what it means to be gospel-centered because there's nothing in the church that is *not* shadowed by the gospel.

Applying the Gospel Everywhere

What to look for in a gospel-centered church:

- The experience of *assurance* of God's favor based on God's grace in Christ.
- People who are identity-oriented as *adopted* sons/ daughters vs. performance-oriented as slaves/ workers/ orphans.
- Transparency in willingness to *confess* REAL sins.
- A different approach to *suffering* and trials as related to God's training vs. God's punishment.
- A new motivation for *service* that is internal and gratitude-based vs. external and duty-based.
- More and more *set free* from self-promotion, self-defending, self-justifying, blame-shifting approach to life.
- *Law-loving* as it is the basis for personal and communal flourishing now that we are no longer law-relying as the basis of being accepted by God.
- *Sabbath*-enjoying in trustful contentment upon God's gracious provisions in Christ.

"Gospel-Centered" means bringing everything in line with the gospel -

Applied to the Individual:

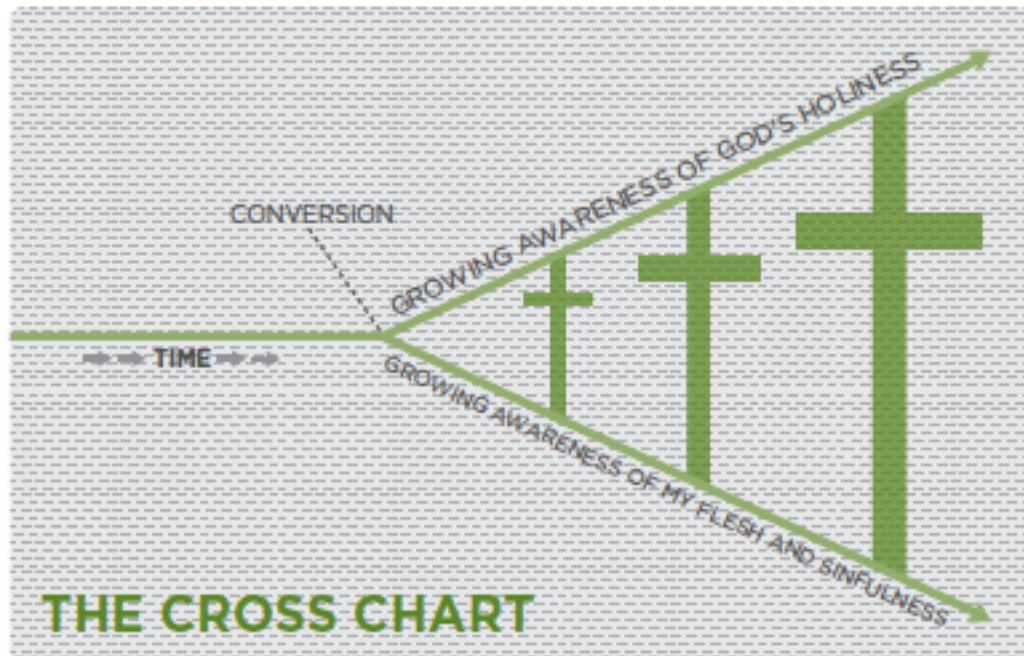
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|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Discouragement | • Witness to non-Christians |
| • The Physical World | • Human Authority |
| • Love and Relationships | • Human Dignity |
| • Suffering | • Guilt |
| • Sexuality | • Self-image |
| • One's Family | • Joy and Humor |
| • Self-control | • "Right Living" |
| • Other races and cultures | |

Applied to the Church:

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
| • Ministry in the world | • Holiness |
| • Worship | • Church Health |
| • Approach to the Poor | • Social Change |
| • Doctrinal Distinctives | |

Charts!

As we grow in Christ, we should be growing in BOTH our *awareness* of God's holiness and our own sin.



Our struggle is that we tend to “shrink the cross” by minimizing our own sin (i.e., pretending, faking, denying), or by minimizing God's holiness (i.e., performing), or both

