

25.3.07 – Living in line with the gospel – Galatians 2:11-16

Misconception: ‘The gospel is for non-Christians, one needs it to be saved, but once saved you grow through hard work and obedience’ (*Or to put it another way: The gospel gets you in there and you think back to it and thank God for saving you 5 years ago but now you are sanctified by putting into practice what the Bible says*)

-This way of thinking is something we commonly slip into and then end up living by and it is deathly, the gospel is the way we grow!

Tim Keller ‘All of us to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not ‘get’ it. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel. A stage of renewal is always the discovery of a new implication or application of the gospel – seeing more of its truth. This is true for either an individual or a church’

Unless we increasingly know and live in line with the gospel we won’t spread it!

***Own testimony of God’s recent work of revealing the gospel. – I felt I had reached the end of my rope, I had been praying for years for the Holy Spirit to teach me and show me more of God’s love and grace, (i.e. Eph 1&3.)**

Martin Luther (16thC), the key person in the reformation of the Christian faith, nailed his 95 thesis to the door of the Wittenberg Church. He would have yielded every point to the pope if the pope had affirmed the gospel: ‘We are simultaneously sinful and flawed and totally loved and accepted’ –this is what you see on the cross, Jesus **had to die** but did it freely **for us in love** so we could live in the good of it. Justified by faith (okay and accepted as you are all the time by faith).

Practical implications of this: When you sin and still feel guilty after putting it right the gospel isn’t at work or when you feel like an underachiever at college, when your children play up and you feel like a bad mother/father, or as a leader of a group people don’t respond or mistreat you! **IT REALLY HURTS!**

***Slot Machine,** need to bang the coins in, to go ‘right down’ so you live out of it more and more, God is simply ‘banging’ us in love so the truth jiggles ‘right down’

Paul addresses similar deathly thinking in the church in Galatia - ***Background** – Paul writes to combat false thinking which has arisen because some of the Jewish traditions and laws were becoming part of the ‘gospel’ in the Gentile churches, Paul says this is a ‘different gospel’ (1:6). Even Peter and Barnabas were led astray (2:11-13)

He uses the phrase (2:14) ‘*they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel*’

1. All Christians are vulnerable to this. Paul has written to the ‘churches in Galatia’(1:2) – these are believers who have known God’s power (3:5) and understood the gospel. He references Apostle Peter and Barnabas who had on this occasion given into fear and pride. (So I speak humbly but confidently to you also!)

2. We never get beyond the gospel, it’s always the thing that we are to live in line with. Paul uses the gospel as the centre for their lives. Paul is not talking about their point of regeneration/salvation as they are believers but about their way of living. Salvation is not in question here. You can be a Christian and live like a fool! (3:1)

What will really change you and give you the ‘power’ to live is the gospel – a growing and accurate deep belief in what it means. It will re-structure your motivations, self understanding and identity and our view of the world. But our understanding is not complete – herein lies the problem.

Tertullian ‘Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors’

-both of which work to ‘steal’ the joy and the ‘power’ and the ‘release’ of the gospel of the grace of Christ.

All people tend to live in these categories to some degree, Christians are still vulnerable to return to what is a sinful, fleshly way of living. A default mechanism.

1. The thief of Legalism/Moralism: Gal 5:1 ‘don’t let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery’

‘Religion is; I obey therefore I am accepted, the gospel is; I am accepted therefore I obey’ – In essence this means that you feel good, positive, righteous, acceptable, joyful by what you manage to do, whereas the gospel says that you are allowed to feel good, positive, righteous, acceptable and joyful without doing anything! The reason you can’t is because you can’t understand and see that fully yet!

Why? The Bible teaches that we are ‘saved’ (in reality), being ‘saved’ (in practice and experience) and will be ‘saved’ (fully completed) in heaven. You are getting it more and more!

Legalistic/Moralistic/Religious tendencies/people (Christian or non):

-will have a strong sense of right and wrong and their own sin, their own erected standard of righteousness or what they’ve got from the Bible and will seek to live by this alone.

-will end up basing the way they feel on how things are going, on meeting their own standard of righteousness, on achieving what they consider to be the mark. It will mean having to look down on those that don’t do it your way in order to maintain your position. **Do you notice this in yourself?**

-will feel awful, guilty and failures when the ‘standard’ or ‘goal’ is not met! You won’t believe it when you commit certain sins, you will feel as if life has finished when you don’t get the career you wanted, you will be crushed when friends/family/colleagues don’t think you meet the mark

THERE IS LITTLE JOY AND FREEDOM UNLESS STANDARDS MAINTAINED

Are you with me so far?!

2. The thief of Licence/Liberalism: Gal 5:13 ‘do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature’

The other end of the spectrum is just to let go, to become ‘irreligious’.

These people will think that they’re okay as they are, that their beliefs are fine for them or if Christians will consider God loves them but have little awareness of their own sin which will affect the depth of their understanding of his love and need for a savior daily.

Therefore, God's love didn't really cost him that much. **C.S. Lewis says it makes God 'a senile old benevolence' who tolerates everyone no matter how they live.**

It will ultimately rob joy and create confusion as there is not really any sense of what is true and the goalposts constantly move, often in reality such people are only 'open' to views that they agree with (we must all be tolerant of others views, but not of Christians if they are not tolerant of ours) or as long as you don't challenge them too much with the Bible!

Point: Both are ways to avoid the gospel and make Christ Lord and ways of 'saving' themselves.

3. The Line of the gospel of Christ: (where I will spend most time): *Gal 2:14 'I saw that they were not acting in line with the gospel'*

a. The gospel line is not a half way between the two, but a totally new way.....

'You are more sinful and flawed than you could know, but simultaneously more loved and accepted than you could know' – the gospel line is to increasingly know and discover this and live out the implications of this, to lose sight of it will mean you've veered away from grace. (*Grace is not just God loves you, but that God loves you as a sinner*)

b. Increasing joy and power and true life is only found at this point or 'line' *Gal 4:15 'what has happened to all your joy?'*

-Which is most acutely seen and found in Christ on the cross, the cornerstone and foundation. It re-orders your very identity at the core. Nothing else in life gives this.

C.S Lewis 'Grace substitutes (or gives us) a full, childlike and delighted acceptance of our need, a joy in total dependence. We become 'Jolly Beggars''

-The result of veering into legalism/moralism (or licence) will ultimately be a lack of joy in Christ, you will either be getting a substitute less glorious joy from something else such as work, family, money, achievement and you will lose joy in things of God, you can't manufacture joy. You secretly know whether there is joy in Christ in you or not and that is what makes you feel so bad when you realize there isn't, you continue doing the 'right thing' in faith but eventually cracks start appearing in private and then in public!

c. To live by the gospel 'line' means that everything we think and do is squared with the fact that you are simultaneously sinful and accepted. = humility and confidence.

Example 1: Paul was saying that Peter's actions don't square with this because if they did he would **a.** Eat with the Gentiles and accept them because in himself he is also a sinner and no better **b.** Be confident and not fearful of the pressure of the Jews because he knows he is accepted in Christ.

Example 2: Dealing with pressure of workload at home or work would mean **a.** being aware that you are a sinner and simply cannot do everything perfectly and will never succeed perfectly every day **b.** being peaceful and restful because you know it doesn't matter as Christ loves you and it adds nothing to or takes nothing away from that.

d. The gospel ‘line’ is what Paul equates with how to ‘keep in step with the Spirit’ (Gal 5:25, In Gal 3:3 he says ‘Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?’

By veering away in actions from the gospel by not eating with Jews, becoming circumcised etc. they are voluntarily adding things ‘to do’ their attaining of the goal of growth/sanctification. They started right but are continuing badly! – we do the same

The Holy Spirit’s power operates and moves through this understanding of the gospel in our lives and as we preach it to others. He is the Spirit of truth and so works mostly to reveal this truth, and not a compromise. Keeping in step with the spirit means to think ‘gospel’.

e. Things will obstruct and cut you up and you will end up trying to ‘save’ yourself: Gal 5:7 ‘You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?’

Anything that removes and robs your joy in Christ and gets you to give your heart to it, is something that is cutting you up! It could be constant pressure, tv advertising, computers, fear, discouragement, failure at work, family tension, financial worries.

It’s as if you are wanting it to ‘save’ you. To provide you with your joy and comfort and at that point it becomes an idol! It becomes your master and it is a hard slave master (Rom 6 & 7) that will never fill the gap or help you, it will simply demand and highlight your weakness.

For me, I felt the Holy Spirit highlighted:

a. The fear of man, wanted their approval and constantly living under the burden of what people think, this will ‘save’ me and make me whole!

b. The need to succeed and achieve and be a successful leader, only that will ‘save’ me and fill the gap of my need!

What is it that cuts in for you?

In times of fear, stress, worry, guilt etc. we have to understand that in that area the gospel is not sufficiently affecting you! Not simply that you are not doing enough or need to buck up your ideas and pull yourself together, this would mean that you are ‘saving’ yourself. In that particular point of your life Christ must become your savior, something else is and that’s why you are reacting as you are. It’s a symptom of where you need the sufficiency of the gospel of Christ to touch you. You must draw near to the cross to receive the truth of the gospel again ‘sinful and accepted!’

f. The gospel is growing and will grow in you and through you. (Phil 1:6; God will bring it to completion!)

Col 1:6 ‘This gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth’

You are not left alone in this process because the gospel is doing it’s work through the Holy Spirit, he is constantly seeking to apply the truth of it to you through all of life, every situation, pain, problem and setback you hit is ‘redeemed’ and ‘used for good’ in order to actually help you understand the gospel and ‘free’ you in ‘practice’ from the burden of slavery! As you are taught as a church, encourage one another, build one another up, serve one another and the community, it helps to sink the gospel into you more deeply.

***Banging the coins into the slot machine** – God is constantly banging his truth into us.

Martin Luther: ‘The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine, most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually’

Practical Application:

It means a new approach to:

1. Prayer & Bible reading – it means that you are praying less and less because you have to and know it’s the right thing to do and more and more because you want to ‘beat the gospel into your head’ and draw near to the one you love and the truth of the gospel which will empower you to then ‘live in line with the gospel’

2. Repentance – repentance means to ‘change your mind/thinking’ not just to say sorry that I didn’t reach the standard and then try again – you will be trying to ‘save yourself again.

It means that you go for the idols underneath the sin and re-align your thinking with the gospel line. You recognize your fear is a failure to trust God, your worry is a sign of pride and trusting yourself, your lust is a sign of seeking comfort in other things than God. Then you receive the liberty that the cross gives you.

Repentance is a process and point of thinking and remembering the gospel of the cross.

3. Handling difficult situations and problems – you don’t just think ‘what is the right thing to do’, but you think what is the ‘gospel line’. What is the approach for someone who is both very humble and aware of their own weakness but very bold and clear on the truth? It’s difficult to get superior and irritated with someone else if you are aware of your own salvation as well as the truth of what they should be doing.

Non-Christians - Receiving the gospel of Christ: Jesus is the good master, he died in order to free you from ‘trying’ and failing at what you can never do. He died in order to make available the lavish love and acceptance that you are really searching for in everything you live by. If your life is based and build upon anything other than the gospel then you will never get what you really need. You need to know you’re in a mess, even if you don’t think you are – your life is a house of cards that will collapse if something goes. You need to know that there is a life of joy and love beyond that.