

# WHAT IS GOSPEL-CENTEREDNESS?

## Introduction

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- Discovering the power, depth, and sufficiency of the Gospel has been extremely exciting, liberating, and transforming. God is so kind to have revealed/illuminated His truth to us!
- The radical, transforming power of the Gospel has been complete and wide-reaching.
- The Gospel is, indeed, “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16) as we seek to “live by faith” in that very Gospel (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:20).

## Importance of Gospel-Centeredness

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- The Gospel is the hub, the core, the center of our faith and ministry. It provides not only the theological framework of our doctrine (1 Cor. 15:3-4; Gal. 1:6-9), but also the starting point for our sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18 – 4:6).
- Without the Gospel at the center, the focus inevitably shifts off of the glory of God and onto the exaltation of men (Gal. 6:14), for the Gospel demands an accurate view of sin and grace in order to reap its powerful benefits (Rom. 6:8-11).
- Because the Gospel is primary in Scripture as the starting point for the Christian life and the truth that enables and motivates our sanctification, a church must truly be of one-heart and one-mind when we speak of “Gospel-centeredness.”

## An Overview of Gospel-Centeredness

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### So what is the Gospel? A Working Definition

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- The Gospel is “good news” that sinners can be saved (justified) by *grace alone* through *faith alone* based on *the blood and righteousness of Christ alone* for *the glory of God alone*.

### What is the Aim of God in Our Salvation?

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- The aim of God in the salvation of sinners is... *the glory of Himself, namely His grace and mercy, as redeemed sinners worship, love, and adore Him forever!*
  - 📖 [Ephesians 2:7](#) ~ [He saved us] <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
  - 📖 [Romans 9:23](#) ~ [He chose some...] <sup>23</sup>in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—
  - 📖 [Romans 15:9](#) ~ <sup>9</sup>and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.”
- Since this is the aim of God for all of eternity, this is His goal for us while we live on earth... to glorify God’s mercy and grace by living upon that grace!

📖 **1 Corinthians 15:10** ~ <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

📖 **1 Timothy 1:16** ~ <sup>16</sup>But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

📖 **1 Peter 4:10-11** ~ <sup>10</sup>As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup>whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### **Why is the Gospel the clearest revelation of the Glory of God?**

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- The absolute freedom of God's sovereign grace is what it means for God to be God. This is the essence of His being God.

📖 **Exodus 33:18-19** ~ <sup>18</sup>Moses said, "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup>And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

📖 **Romans 9:15** ~ <sup>15</sup>For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

- Therefore, the death of the Son of God stands as the pinnacle of God's glory because more than any other act of God, it reveals His grace most evidently.

📖 **2 Corinthians 4:4, 6** ~ <sup>4</sup>In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

📖 **Titus 2:11** ~ <sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

- This explains why for the rest of eternity, the object of praise will be "the Lamb who was slain" (Rev. 5:12) and His grace towards redeemed sinners.

📖 **Ephesians 2:7** ~ <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

📖 **Revelation 5:12** ~ <sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

📖 **Revelation 22:3** ~ <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

📖 **Romans 9:23** ~ <sup>23</sup>in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—

### **Why is the Gospel the Starting Point of both our Justification and Sanctification?**

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- The Gospel is the starting point of our justification because it is the power of God unto salvation. The glory of Christ embodied in the Gospel truth is necessary for the Spirit to regenerate us (Rom. 10:17).

📖 **Romans 1:16** ~ <sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

📖 **2 Corinthians 4:6** ~ <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

📖 **2 Timothy 1:10** ~ <sup>10</sup>and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

- The Gospel is also the starting point of our sanctification because God has designed heart/life transformation to take place as the believer is repeatedly exposed to the glory of God through the glory of Christ in His Cross-work.

📖 **2 Corinthians 3:18** ~ <sup>18</sup>And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

- And nowhere is the glory of God more clearly visible than in the Gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners!

📖 **2 Corinthians 4:4, 6** ~ <sup>4</sup>In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

- Since the justified believer is still a sinner and nothing more (Rom. 7:15-24), the only means of sanctification is the perfect righteousness of Christ which has been graciously imputed to the sinner through the death and resurrection of Christ.

📖 **Galatians 2:20** ~ <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

📖 **1 Corinthians 15:9-10** ~ <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

- The Gospel is also the focal point of our glorification as well since we will worship the Lamb of God forever and ever!

📖 **Revelation 5:12-13** ~ <sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup>And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

### **How does the Gospel produce heart transformation?**

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- The core of sin is unbelief, which underlies each and every sin (Gen. 3:1-7). The Gospel produces heart transformation by bringing the truths of the Gospel to bear on the believer's mind and heart through faith.
- By trusting in the Gospel truth...
  - Believing that God chose me before the foundation of the world to be His (Eph. 1:4)
  - Believing that I am a sinner and deserving of God's eternal wrath (Eph. 2:1-3)
  - Believing that I am saved by grace alone through the precious death of the Son of God (Eph. 2:8)
  - Believing that this salvation is undeserved for this "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15)
  - Believing that the Cross is the pinnacle of God's love and mercy for this sinner (Rom. 5:8)

- God **convicts** me of my sin and **convinces** me of His love... and this truth received by faith humbles my heart and God grants a passionate love for Him within me (1 Jn. 4:19; John 8:42 & 1:12).

📖 **Luke 7:47** ~ <sup>47</sup>Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

□ “We will love God to the degree that we recognize the magnitude of our sins and the immensity of God’s grace to forgive them... As a Pharisee, Simon likely had significant theological learning, memorized extensive portions of Scripture, exercised rigorous self-discipline, tithed meticulously, spent much time ‘serving’ God, and enjoyed a reputation as a godly man. And yet he did not love God. The woman, however, who had nothing to offer except shameful sin, was described by Jesus as a model for true worship. Why? Simply because she knew how desperately she needed the forgiveness Jesus offered in His gospel, and she believed that He could grant it... That is what Jesus is looking for. That is the faith that saves... True worship is a passionate love for God. And, for sinners like us, the fuel of that love is a profound realization, in the words of former slave trader-turned-pastor, John Newton, ‘that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.’” (Jon Bloom, DGM August 2009 Newsletter)

- Therefore, love for God motivates and empowers all acts of obedience for God and fulfills the greatest commandment in the Bible (Matt. 22:37-38).

📖 **John 14:15** ~ <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

### **How is Justification the basis of our Sanctification? Or, How does the Gospel change the way we relate to God?**

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- Justification by faith is that doctrine whereby God declares the sinner righteous on the basis of faith (Rom. 3:28) through the means of Christ’s death and righteousness (Rom. 5:9).
- Justification is broken down even further through the truths of **expiation** and **imputation**.
  - **Expiation (Pardon)** ~ Christ removes all our sin through His substitutionary death (Rom. 3:25; Col. 2:13-14).
  - **Imputation (Power)** ~ Christ imputes to us His perfect righteousness so that we always remain in perfect legal standing before the Father (Rom. 4:3; 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21).

- Therefore, the sinner can approach the throne of God’s grace (Heb. 4:16) because by faith, we trust in Christ’s death in forgiving all of our sin!

📖 **Romans 8:1, 33-34** ~ <sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... <sup>33</sup>Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

- But not only is all of our sin forgiven, everything we need to love and obey God is provided for us through the perfect righteousness of Christ!

📖 **Galatians 2:20** ~ <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- Therefore, the Gospel eliminates my sinful bent towards **penance** – earning God’s favor through self-effort – by reminding my wayward heart that God has already finished the work

of forgiveness and has removed the wrath and guilt for every single one of my sins against Him (John 19:30; Matt. 27:46).

- The Gospel also eliminates my sinful bent towards **performance** – becoming righteous through self-effort, i.e. “self-righteous” – because it is only through Christ’s righteousness that I can ever become holy and Christlike!
- The Gospel then becomes the means of killing my sinful pride and reminding me that there is absolutely no reason to boast in anything but the Cross of Christ!

📖 **Galatians 6:14** ~ <sup>14</sup>But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

### **How do I appropriate the power of the Gospel in my life?**

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- The only means we have available to us in appropriating all of God’s Gospel grace and benefits is by FAITH alone!

📖 **Galatians 2:20** ~ <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- Faith is both a **renunciation** of self and a **reliance** upon Christ alone for all of the gracious benefits of His perfect life and sacrificial death.

📖 **Hebrews 11:6** ~ <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

📖 **John 15:5** ~ <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

📖 **Ephesians 3:17** ~ <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

📖 **Matthew 18:3-4** ~ <sup>3</sup>and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

- Therefore, the Gospel is not only the means of our justification (Rom. 1:16), but also of our sanctification.

📖 **Romans 1:17** ~ <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

📖 **2 Thessalonians 2:13** ~ <sup>13</sup>But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

- ☐ *“Obey by Faith. Every duty must be done in faith, in the strength from Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). It isn’t enough for you to be a believer, though that’s the beginning of every good work (Eph. 2:10) – you must also act in faith in every duty. Our whole obedience is ‘the obedience that comes from faith’ (Rom. 1:5). So Christ is called ‘our life’ (Col. 3:4), meaning He is our spiritual life: the Spring, Author, and Cause of it. No spiritually living act – no duty that is acceptable to God – can be performed but by the actual working of Christ, who is our life. ‘The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God’ (Gal. 2:20).” ~ Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within**
- ☐ *“Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One.” ~ Hudson Taylor*

## What is the greatest gift of the Gospel?

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- The greatest gift of the Gospel is God Himself and the enjoyment of His glory through the the precious work of His Son.
  - 📖 **1 Peter 3:18** ~ <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,
  - 📖 **Psalm 16:11** ~ <sup>11</sup>You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
- ☐ *Salvation may be described as the blind receiving sight, the deaf receiving hearing, the dead receiving life; but we have not only received these blessings, we have received CHRIST JESUS himself. It is true that he gave us life from the dead. He gave us pardon of sin; he gave us imputed righteousness. These are all precious things, but we are not content with them; we have received Christ himself. The Son of God has been poured into us, and we have received him, and appropriated him. What a heartfelt Jesus must be, for heaven itself cannot contain him!* (Charles Spurgeon, *Morning & Evening*, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>)

## Practical Ramifications of the Gospel

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### What role does the Word of God play in all this?

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- The Word of God becomes for the Gospel-centered believer, the only ground of our faith since it holds the promises of God for us!
- Therefore, the Word becomes the believer's refuge and hope as we run to it and cling to the promises of God from it.
  - 📖 **2 Peter 1:3-4** ~ <sup>3</sup>His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup>by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
  - 📖 **2 Corinthians 1:20** ~ <sup>20</sup>For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.
  - 📖 **Romans 10:17** ~ <sup>17</sup>So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

### What hinders my sanctification?

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- If the glory of God embodied in the vision of Christ is the core, fundamental means by which a believer is sanctified (2 Cor. 3:18), then anytime my vision of Christ is incomplete or hindered, I will not grow in sanctification.
- This partial picture of Christ can entail His personhood as Savior and Lord. And it can also entail His work in both expiation and imputation.
  - By doubting His constant love and forgiveness, I can reject His completed expiatory work for the complete forgiveness of my sins (Col. 2:13-14; Matt. 27:46), which then turns my relationship with Him into one of legalism and self-reliance.
  - By doubting the sufficiency of His perfect righteousness as the basis of my own, I can reject Christ's resources and rely upon my own self-righteousness (Phil. 3:9; Gal. 2:2).

## **How does the Gospel affect evangelism?**

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- Since the evidence of genuine Gospel-transformation is far more than adhering to Gospel facts and outward conformity to the Bible, the Gospel that is presented to believers ought also to address the motivations and affections of the heart (1 Cor. 16:22).
  - Reciting Gospel facts and adhering to an “avoidance ethic” (i.e. not doing certain things the Bible forbids) is not the critical evidence of salvation (Matt. 5:20; 7:22).
  - Belief in the Gospel truth (Rom. 10:17) and love for Christ (1 Cor. 16:22) that issues forth in Christ-exalting works (John 14:15; 15:5)
- This keeps Jesus Christ at the center of all our worship and adoration for it is His love and mercy in His death and resurrection which is the focus of our faith, not His gifts to us (i.e. feeling better about ourselves, the removal of guilt, avoiding hell, etc...).

## **Does Gospel-Centeredness undermine Lordship Salvation?**

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- The question may arise as to whether this emphasis on the grace of God may lead to a casual, cavalier life of libertinism for the believer (i.e. Rom. 6:1).
  - What about repentance and holiness as the fruits of conversion? Won't this emphasis on the grace of God keep us from becoming holy? (cf. Jam. 2:14ff)
- Two groups of people may ask this question:
  - The first are those who are struggling with the abandonment of their pride in self-righteousness (Luke 15:2, 25-30). The grace of the Gospel challenges pride and confronts the self-righteous person head on.
  - The second are those who truly care about the Gospel and desire to protect it from the kind of fruitlessness that stems from false professions of faith (cf. Jam. 2:14ff).
- Gospel-centeredness does not undermine Lordship salvation, but elevates Christ as Lord to the highest degree since love for Christ is the underlying motive behind all acts of obedience.
  - The believer who loves and cherishes Christ does so because he sees the gravity of his sinfulness before a holy and merciful God (Luke 7:47).
  - And the weight of the glory of Christ and His Cross-work upon his soul causes him to abandon sin and self and to pursue Christ alone because they have seen that Jesus is more satisfying than sin ever could be (2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 11:24-26).
  - The Cross exposes our sin down to the deepest depths, and when this occurs, because Christ is the only hope for any righteousness, the believer gladly endures the pain of sin's exposure in order to receive grace for help in time of need (1 Tim. 1:15-16; Heb. 4:16)... receiving grace becomes a source of much joy!
- The Gospel reaches down, not merely to our outward behavior – something that we can change on our own – but to our motivations and affections – something that we cannot change on our own.
  - Therefore, Gospel-centeredness transforms, not just outward behavior, but starts with the heart motives which inevitably lead to holiness of life and character (John 14:15).
  - This complete transformation of one's life – motives, affections, desires, thoughts, attitudes, speech, and actions – gives all glory to the One who died for our lives (Rom. 6:8-14).
  - Motivations determine who gets the glory... therefore, the motivation for the glory of Christ will inevitably lead to Christlikeness!