

What Is The Gospel?

Romans 6-11

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Well, as we continue here in Romans chapter nine we have come to that last paragraph in Romans chapter nine and we look at verses 30 through the end of the chapter, Romans chapter nine beginning in verse 30.

If you remember, this excursus here in chapters nine through 11 are dealing with the issue of Israel and the apparent forsaking of Israel. It is dealing with what is seen outwardly of Israel and the explanation of it. In that context we come to this last paragraph that really sums up what he has begun here in chapter nine and what I like to call a tale two sinners. Beginning in verse 30.

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”¹

This is not new. We have seen this juxtaposition of the Jew and the Gentile, for example, in chapters one and two and specifically in chapter two as he talked about the law and the Gentiles being a law unto themselves. The whole point that Paul is making here is that your only hope is the gospel. It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. And here he points to and answers the question: What is going on and what is wrong with Israel? What is wrong with Israel, he says, is that they have pursued righteousness though the law. And the Gentiles have attained righteousness that they did not pursue and they have attained it through faith. It is the difference between works righteousness and the gospel. That is what this all boils down to. It is the difference between works righteousness and the gospel.

¹ Romans 9:30-33.

Now we say that. and as we look at this paragraph and as we hear again this word gospel and as we say that it is the difference between the Jew and the Greek in this paragraph, again, not saying that there are no Jews who have been saved. Paul himself is a living denial of that. He is a Jew who has been saved, but not through pursuing the law. He has been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and it is that gospel that he is proclaiming and it is that gospel that is the hope of the Jew and the Greek alike. But when we use that word gospel it is weighty and misunderstood. And so what we are going to deal with today is the gospel, what the gospel is not and what the gospel is, because that is Paul's overarching point here in chapter nine. The difference between those who have come and those who have not is that those who have come have come by way of the gospel, which is where Paul starts in chapter one. And those who have not, have not come because they have trusted something other than the gospel.

Now he talks about this distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles and we have seen that distinction as I have said, throughout his letter. But here he comes to the crux of the matter. In order for us to deal with this, let me unpack these terms, realizing that I am using these terms in the context of a culture that has perverted them. We no longer know what the terms mean. When I say gospel there may be several things that come to your mind that are anything but the gospel. Let me give you three things that the gospel is not that we need to understand in this day and age. And I am indebted to the work of D. A. Carson here on this in an article that he wrote in the *Spurgeon Journal* about what the gospel is not. There are several pieces out there about what is being touted out there as the gospel and how those things are off base. And you can get anything from one or two things, from seven to two things, but these three, I think, boil it down best.

Number one, the gospel is not just how we get saved. You talk to the average Christian and you ask them what the gospel is and more than likely they are going to give you a plan of salvation. The gospel is not the plan of salvation. The gospel is not the four spiritual laws. The gospel is not just how we get saved.

Listen to Carson's statement here. "For some Christians the gospel is a narrow set of teachings about Jesus and his death and resurrection, which, rightly believed, tip people into the kingdom. After that, real discipleship and personal transformation begin, but none of that is integrally related to the gospel."

In other words, we believe the gospel is what you need to get saved, but you need to graduate to something beyond the gospel after you have gotten saved. We say a person preaches the gospel if a person preaches a, you know, a Billy Graham Crusade salvation message designed and geared toward the altar call at the end, but if they preach something that is not designed and geared toward the altar call at the end, we say it is not the gospel.

I have often gone to preach places and had people ask me: Are you going to preach a gospel message or will this be for believers? That is how we think. Is it going to be a

gospel message or will it be for believers? Yes, because believers need the gospel. The gospel is not just how we get saved.

Listen to Tim Keller. “We never get beyond the gospel in our Christian life to something more advanced. The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of truths, rather it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth. The gospel is not just the ABCs, but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

So mistake number one, we see the gospel as just how people get saved. The gospel is the A B C, acknowledge your sin, believe in Christ, confess him as your Savior. You all heard that one? That is not the gospel. It is a cheap substitute. It is not the gospel. Nor is it correct to say that unbelievers need the gospel, but believers need something more. Folks, there is nothing more than the gospel. You never move beyond the gospel. You never outgrow the gospel. You never become too sophisticated for the gospel. If you think you are too sophisticated for the gospel, you don’t know what the gospel is.

Secondly, the gospel is not just the two great commandments. And that is what is popular in our day. You just boil it down to love God and love people. Listen to Carson’s word on this. “Other voices identify the gospel with the first and second commandments, the commandments to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourself. These commandments are so central that Jesus himself insists that all the prophets and the law hang on them, but, most emphatically, they are not the gospel.”

Love God, it is not the gospel. In fact, here is the irony. That phrase, love God, love people, is actually a summary of the law. It is the opposite of the gospel. Listen to what Paul says about that in Romans chapter 13 verses eight through 10.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word:²

By the way, notice he is talking about the second table of the law, the horizontal commandments:

...summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.³

We use that phrase as though we have unlocked a magic key to the gospel and the irony is we have run right back to the law like a dog running to its vomit. And it sounds so good and it is ubiquitous.

² Romans 13:8-9.

³ Romans 13:9-10.

Do a search some time for love God, love people and church. You will find thousands of churches like South Side Christian Church, love God, love people. But then you find others who get creative with it. Morrow Baptist Church, love God, love people, change the world. Inglewood Baptist Church, love God, love people, serve the world. Believer's church, love God, love people, tell the world. Victory Baptist Church, love God, love people, reach the world. Or Gulf Gate Baptist Church, love God, love people, serve the world. How about Double Heads Baptist Church? Love God, love people, serve both. Or the Rock, love God, love people, do something about it. Eastside Christian Church, love God, love people, build relationships. Smithfield Baptist Church, love God, love people, make disciples. The Gathering Place, love God, love people, live life. Praise City Church, love God, love people, love life. How about Destiny Church? Love God, love people, love life, love our city. How about Courageous Church? Love god, love people, prove it. North City Church of Christ, love God, love people, be changed. Keep the law, be changed. And finally, Experience Church, Sifty Harbor, love God, love people, period.

It is ubiquitous. That is the catch phrase of our day. And it is a catch phrase that is used by people who intend to say get away from all that law stuff. Get away from all that Legalism. Just love God and love people. And what they just said was, "Get away from the law, obey the law." Because if you just obey the law, then you don't have to worry about the law.

Now am I saying that we don't love God and we don't love people? That is what the gospel produces, not what the gospel commands. The gospel produces that in the life of the believer. And it is evidence that we love God, that we have been born again. We love God and we love others because of what Christ has done in us. It is because of the work of the gospel in our lives. It is not a substitute for the gospel. That is blasphemous. That is blasphemous. And, again, all of these churches may communicate that clearly somewhere, generally not on their website. I looked.

Three, the gospel is not the moral teachings of Jesus. Ok? Listen to this one carefully, especially those of us who live in home school circles, because you hear this one a lot. The gospel is all of the moral teachings of Jesus. The third option today is to treat the ethical teaching of Jesus found in the gospel as the gospel. Yet it is the ethical teaching of Jesus abstracted from the passion and resurrection narrative found in each gospel.

Think about this for a moment. If we say that the gospel is all the moral teachings of Jesus found in the gospels, then here is what we have said. You see, God in the Old Testament gave us a law, but that law either wasn't righteous enough, wasn't clear enough or wasn't effective enough. So Jesus came and gave us another law so that that one could be kept, because our problem wasn't us. It was God. Made a mistake the first time, had to come correct it. The first law didn't work, gave us another law. All that stuff about his Son dying, don't know how that fits into this mindset if all he came was to just give us another law. Folks, that is not the gospel. That is not the gospel. That looks more like Israel here. Listen again.

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by...”⁴

...loving God and loving people. Or that is by a righteousness that is by keeping all the moral teachings of Jesus in the gospels or that is by...

No.

“...that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness...”⁵

Do these things and these things will lead you to a right relationship with God. Keep God’s law and you will become acceptable before God. Do this. It sounds like all these things are not the gospel, doesn’t it? And that is not just true here as Paul was writing Romans. It is true today as we read Romans in the 21st century. It has always been true and it will always be true, because man is allergic to the gospel. It breaks us out in moral hives. We don’t like the gospel. We don’t trust the gospel. That is why even those who sang yes, I believe the gospel, but I have also got to have the law in order for me to maintain my standing in the gospel. No, you need the gospel to maintain your standing in the gospel.

Jesus did not come to give you a kick start because you weren’t just a little bit off course. You are ruined and rotten from the core. That is your problem. Jesus didn’t just come to be an example as though somehow all you needed was the right person in front of you so that you could get in line. You actually have an aversion to righteousness and, in fact, in Galatians Paul tells us that was one of the main purposes of the law, that you could stare at God’s holiness, stare at God’s righteousness—and here is something echoing in your mind. I don’t cut it. I can’t get there from here. I can’t make it. No matter what I do, no matter how I try, I absolutely, positively in any way, shape, form or fashion even approximate anything close to the righteousness that is required of me in the law and even when I do something that approximates it, I am so proud of it that now my pride is another sin that I have to deal with. Amen somebody.

That is the picture that Paul paints. They are following the law in order to be right with God. And, again, if you have been listening and I... but I am still going to say it again and again. If you have been listening, Paul is not arguing for Antinomianism. Paul is not arguing that the law is bad. He says the law is good. The law is righteous. The law is holy. And, in fact, when we come to Christ, when we are in Christ, Christ not only has kept the law for us so that God, because of the active obedience of Christ sees us as law keepers, but Christ also keeps the law in us. He kept the law for us. And he keeps the law in us, not he gives us the ability to work harder for the law.

I am just so grateful that we read Matthew chapter 11 today.

⁴ Romans 9:30.

⁵ Romans 9:30-31.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you [work]. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...”⁶

And then you will have the strength to grit it out. Not what it says.

“Come to me, all who labor...”⁷

How do we know if we have come to him? Because we are resting.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.”⁸

“...my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁹

If you see Jesus as merely having given you an example that you can work hard to follow, you are under the wrong yoke. Don't just take it off, break it into pieces and burn it by the grace of God. Amen? You are under the wrong yoke.

Well, that raises the question again, not that begs the question, begging the question is a logical flaw in an argument. That was extra. Don't say that begs the question, when what you mean is that raises the question, ok? That was extra. So that raises the question: What is the gospel?

Here is what is interesting. It came down to the last phrase. And I am working through the whole time we have been in Romans just being saturated in the gospel, the gospel, the gospel, asking myself how did you communicate what the gospel is in a succinct manner? And as I am thinking through it he makes this statement. He goes and he looks at Isaiah, several passages in Isaiah and he brings them together in this statement. And look at what he says. Go to verse 32.

“Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.”¹⁰

There is two ways. It is either faith or works.

“They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written...”¹¹

And then here is the statement. Paul is not saying here that this is the gospel. But if you look at the elements in the statement that he makes, what you see are the elements of a gospel centered statement. Now I will explain that in a moment. But for now just look at the statement.

⁶ Matthew 11:28-29.

⁷ Matthew 11:28.

⁸ Matthew 11:29.

⁹ Matthew 11:30.

¹⁰ Romans 9:32.

¹¹ Romans 9:32-33.

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”¹²

There is the difference between the two. The difference between the two is that the Gentile has come based upon this truth that we find in the Old Testament.

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”¹³

That is a succinct statement that has all the major elements of the gospel. Let me explain. Paul makes a statement earlier on in chapter one. Let me read it.

“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.”¹⁴

Thesis statement for the book of Romans, basically. That everything else that I am about to say is about this right there. What is the gospel? How is man made right before God, the Jew and also the Greek?

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”¹⁵

How are we right before God? The answer is the gospel. The gospel is that power that makes us right before God. So what are the main elements? Let me give you these five things the I believe you see here in this statement. It has all of these characteristics that will help us to remember these five things about what the gospel is.

First of all, the gospel is news. How does he start his statement out? Behold, listen up. Hear ye, hear ye. I am making a statement. I am making a declaration. The gospel is news. The word for gospel, εὐαγγέλιον (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), it means announcement. It means news. The gospel is news. By the way, let me put this footnote here. We do not live the gospel. We cannot live the gospel, ok? That is foolishness. You don't live news. For me to say I am going to live out the gospel is like me saying I am going to live out the front page story in the newspaper yesterday. If I came to you and I said, “Hey, man, I have decided I am going to live out the front page story in the newspaper yesterday,” what would you say to me? Actually that is news that happened yesterday. You can't live it out. You don't live the gospel.

And so somebody walks up to you... well, you know, Saint Francis said, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” You look at them and you say, “He didn't know what the gospel is, obviously, because nobody who knows what the gospel is would say such foolishness.”

¹² Romans 9:33.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Romans 1:16.

¹⁵ Romans 1:17.

You have to use words to preach the gospel, whether they are written words or spoken words, you have to use words. Why? Because the gospel is news. That would be like saying, "Give the news at all times and when necessary use words." And then you turn on the television and there is a bunch of people out there just sort of living their lives and you look at it and somehow you are supposed to determine what the news is. Are you following me? Is it beginning to register, because you don't like what I just said, because you hear it so often that you have begun to accept and maybe even say it yourself. We just have to live out the gospel. You can't live out the gospel. The gospel is news.

Now you can live in light of the gospel. You can live because of the gospel, but you cannot live the gospel. Here is the other thing. The gospel is news about what God has done in Jesus Christ. For me to think that I can live the gospel is to put myself in the place of Christ. That is blasphemy. You don't need the news about Jesus, just watch me. Help you if you can sing that without having the desire to crawl up under one of these chairs. The gospel is not something we live. The gospel is news from, about, for, through God, because the gospel is God centered. The gospel is not just news, but it is God centered news. The sinner in the core of the gospel is what God has done, not what I have done. The sinner and the core of the gospel is what God has done. Let me say that again. The gospel is news from, about, for, and through God. The gospel is not just news. It is God centered news. If you are at the center of your discussion about the gospel, then it is not a discussion about the gospel. If it is a discussion about the gospel, God will be at the center of it, not you. God. It is God centered.

Listen to this, Mark 1:14.

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God."¹⁶

I love that. The gospel is God centered. It also means that the gospel is not man centered. The gospel doesn't begin with God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. The gospel is not about you. The gospel is about God. The gospel is about creation, fall, redemption and consummation, creation by God, fall from God, redemption to God and consummation through God. It is God centered.

What role does man play in the gospel? The role that man plays in the gospel is the foil. You are the problem in the gospel, but the way we usually talk about the gospel is not at all God centered. It is man centered and here is what it sounds like. You are so awesome that God made the world just so that one day he could look at you and you are also so awesome that God sent his Son Jesus because he couldn't imagine life without you in eternity. And so he stands here right now pleading with you, begging you because he just cannot imagine his life without you. Would you please do God the favor of accepting Christ so that he can finally be at peace because he has got you?

That is not the gospel. The gospel is God centered, not man centered. The gospel is not about how special you are. The gospel is about how sovereign God is. The gospel is not

¹⁶ Mark 1:14.

about how much God needs or wants you. The gospel is about much you need God. The gospel is not about how bad things are going to be for God if you don't come. The gospel is about how bad things are for you and will continue to be for you throughout eternity if you do not get God centered like the gospel. That is the gospel. Behold I lay in Zion. That is the statement. Behold I lay in Zion. It is about what God has done. It is about who God is. It is not about you.

Thirdly, the gospel is Christ centered. Behold I lay in Zion what? A stumbling stone. Now he is referencing here Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, but in the New Testament we see this in 1 Peter chapter two verses six through eight, Mark 12:10-11, Matthew 21:42, Luke 20 and 17 and also in Acts 4:11. And in all of those places we see that the stumbling stone is a reference to Christ. Behold, news, I lay in Zion, God centered, a stumbling stone, Christ centered. Christ is the crux of the matter. The gospel is Christ centered.

Martin Luther says, "Gospel is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ." The gospel is Christ centered, not man centered.

Listen to Andreas Kostenberger. "The gospel is not vaguely theological. It is decidedly and concretely christological, that is, centered on the salvation provided through the victorious cross death of the Lord Jesus Christ. the gospel is about Christ. It is news about what God has done in Christ. The gospel is news about what God has done in Christ. So the gospel is a proclamation of news. It is a God centered proclamation of news and it is a Christ centered proclamation of news. The gospel is news about what God has done in Christ. Behold, news. I lay in Zion, God centered, a stumbling stone.

And then a rock of offence. What is the scandal? There is that Greek word σκανδαλον (skan'-dal-on). What is the scandal in the gospel? What is it that makes the gospel scandalous news? Folks, it is the cross that makes the gospel scandalous news, the fact that the God of the universe killed is only begotten Son, pouring out his wrath on sin that is justly deserved by every human being, but has been poured out on his Son as a substitute for those whom the Father had given to the Son before the world began. The gospel is cross centered.

Listen to this. Acts chapter two verses 22-24.

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.¹⁷

1 Corinthians 1:22-24.

¹⁷ Acts 2:22-24.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.¹⁸

It is the cross.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.¹⁹

Finally, Galatians 3:1.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”²⁰

It is cross centered. Now let's be careful here. When we say it is cross centered there are ways that we could even miss that, because we can use the cross the wrong way. You have been there before. Haven't you been in Easter services or other kinds of services where basically the cross is presented like this? Look at how gruesome the cross was. He did that for you. Can't you live your life for him?

Do you remember when *The Passion of the Christ* came out? People would sit.... I sat in a theater that church where I was service had rented and watched that film, one of the most gruesome, grotesque things I have ever seen, pornographic violence, awful, one of the most jarring, emotional experiences I have ever had. At the end of the movie sitting there, silent and sobbing and then somebody walks up to they front of the theater that has been rented to give an altar call based on what? Did you see how gruesome that was? That is what he did for you. That is how much he loved you. When I say cross centered that is not what I mean, that you use the cross as a tool to help men know how much they are worth. No, cross centered means you help men understand how significant and weighty their sin is. The cross is a reminder of how holy God is. The cross is a reminder that God demands payment and satisfaction. The cross is a reminder that you may not approach God with your sinful, filthy life and your filthy hands and that there must be propitiation, that the wrath of God must be poured out upon sin, that God's righteousness has to be satisfied. Justice has to be served and you are not worthy. Christ alone was worthy. And on the cross he suffered and he died because he was worthy. And he rose again on the third day because death had no right to hold him. That is what cross centered theology is. We take the cross and turn it into man centered theology. That is how ego centric and narcissistic we are. Whether it is southern gospel, he was on the cross, I was on his mind; or contemporary Christian, crucified, laid behind a stone, he lived and died

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:22-24.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

²⁰ Galatians 3:1.

rejected and alone, like a rose trampled on the ground. You took the fall and thought of me above all. How dare we? How dare we? It is the glory and righteousness and holiness of the Father that is vindicated on the cross, not my worth. It is the worth of Christ as vindicated on the cross. It is the magnitude of my sin that is demonstrated on the cross. And that is why it is scandalous. It is scandalous, because we listen to that and what do people say in our day? People say in our day, I look at that and it is cosmic child abuse to quote.

Some famous Anglican rector has said that this view of the cross is like thinking of God as an angry man who comes home and he is angry with his wife, but he kicks his dog to take it out on the dog. We don't understand the cross. We don't understand sin. We don't understand the Levitical law and how God foreshadowed for his people in types and shadows the blood of bulls and lambs and goats giving them a picture in their mind that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

And then one day on that high, holy day when they are thinking back and are remembering the exodus, remembering how a lamb was slain and his blood was placed on the door post so that the death angel would pass by, remembering in the desert the serpent that was placed high on that cross and that they would look at him and live and now Jesus Christ, him who knew no sin becomes sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him. That is not cosmic child abuse. That is God vindicating his righteousness and allowing himself to still have mercy on you, a sinner who deserves to hang on that cross and then spend eternity separated from God in hell.

But the gospel, the scandal is that it wasn't you. It was the spotless, sinless Lamb of God who died in your place. That is the gospel. It is news about what God has done in Christ through the cross. That is the gospel. You can't live that. But you also can't live without it.

The gospel is grace centered. The next statement he makes, Behold, news, I am laying in Zion, God centered, a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence, Christ centered, cross centered. And then, look. Whoever lives a life worthy of him... no. Whoever believes in him. That is the answer. Here is the amazing thing. And a lot of people will go here and they will say, right there, there is the work that man does. Man does the believing work. You are absolutely right. Man must believe. He must believe. But watch this. Go back to verse 30.

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness...”²¹

Except for the fact that they made a determination in their... no.

“...have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith.”²²

Well, faith was the pursuit. Well, if faith is the pursuit, then the first clause is a lie. The

²¹ Romans 9:30.

²² Ibid.

first clause says that they did not pursue. If faith was a pursuit then the first clause is not true. In other words, even in this statement you have election. It is grace. It is the grace of God. Listen to this, John 1:16-17.

And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.²³

It is grace centered.

Acts 15:11:

“But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”²⁴

Romans 5:15.

“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”²⁵

Ephesians 2:4-9, perhaps the most beautiful presentation of this anywhere in the Bible.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.²⁶

How many times do you see Christ Jesus in grace in that one paragraph? The gospel is grace centered, not just for your salvation, but also for your sanctification. The gospel is grace centered.

Finally, the gospel is eschatological. Look at that last phrase. Behold, it is news, I am laying in Zion, it is God centered, a stone of stumbling, Christ centered, a rock of offence, cross centered, whoever believes, grace centered, will not be put to shame. That is eschatological. That is not psychological. It is eschatological. When he says he will not be put to shame, that is a reference to the judgment to come. That is a reference to that day when you will stand before God. That doesn’t mean that you poke your chest out. Why would you? There is no boasting when you understand that it is of grace.

²³ John 1:16-17.

²⁴ Acts 15:11.

²⁵ Romans 5:15.

²⁶ Ephesians 2:4-9.

Paul argued earlier on:

“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.”²⁷

So this is not psychological. This is eschatological. We have hope in the gospel. Now, mind you, because it is eschatological, what do we eliminate? We eliminate any possibility that somehow the gospel is just how we get in and then we have to work to keep ourselves. If that were the case, I have no eschatological hope.

Are you saved? Yeah, I am right now, but it depends on how firmly I hold on to this thing.

Now we laugh at that, but do you live like it? Do you believe that the grace that saves you is the grace that keeps you? Do you believe that you will stand before God one day because of this news about what God has done in Christ through the cross by grace for your eschatological hope?

Listen to John Hendricks. “In short, the gospel is the life altering news that Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God became man, lived a sinless life under the law, died for sinners and rose again to reconcile them to himself eternally victorious over every enemy that stood between God and man. Now because of his redemptive work, there is nothing that separates those who believe from their creator and all the benefits that he promises in him.”

That is the gospel. And the difference between Israel and the Gentiles is quite simply this. One is holding out hope, pursuing, racing towards ... there is a racing metaphor here in the language, racing toward a law with the belief that eventually it will be attained and through attaining it righteousness, right standing with God and another who simply believes the pronouncement of the news of what God has done in Christ through the cross by grace for the eschatological hope of those who faith their faith in him. The difference is the gospel. That is the difference. Our hope is the gospel. And it is our only hope.

Let's hold on to this, because we have a tendency not to. I will close with this. A little bit more lengthy from Carson, but necessary, especially for those of us who are in the process of raising children and desire to see them come to faith and live their lives in a gospel centered way.

“Perhaps more common yet is the tendency to assume the gospel, whatever that is, while devoting creative energy and passion to other issues—marriage, happiness, prosperity, evangelism, the poor, wrestling with Islam, wrestling with the pressures of secularization, bioethics, dangers on the left, dangers on the right—the list is endless. This overlooks the fact that our hearers inevitably are drawn toward that about which we are most passionate. Every teacher knows that. My students are unlikely to learn all that I teach them; they are most likely to learn that about which I am most excited. If the gospel is

²⁷ Romans 3:27.

merely assumed, while relatively peripheral issues ignite our passion, we will train a new generation to downplay the gospel and focus zeal on the periphery. Moreover, if in fact we focus on the gospel, we shall soon see that this gospel, rightly understood, directs us how to think about, and what to do about, a substantial array of other issues. These issues, if they are analyzed on their own, as important as they are, remain relatively peripheral; ironically, if the gospel itself is deeply pondered and remains at the center of our thinking and living, it powerfully addresses and wrestles with all these other issues.”

You don't put the gospel down to go deal with other issues and then come back to the gospel. You pick the gospel up and look at everything through the prism of the gospel. It is not... yeah, I know the gospel, we get the gospel right, but there is this other stuff over here that we have got to give our attention to. No, the gospel stays here. It is the gospel that orients my thinking on every other issue so that I can approach it rightly, because if I don't, then what happens is I am putting my hope in something else.

A couple of examples: Politics. If politics is what I give my focus and my attention to and as I am focusing on politics and as I am putting my attention on politics, what I am doing is I am saying, “Over here is where I do my gospel work, but out there is where I do my other work.” I have completely missed the boat.

What does the gospel say about politics? And when I say, what does the gospel say about politics, I don't mean is there a proof text that I can use to run off on, but when I look at this through a God centered, Christ centered, cross centered, grace centered, eschatological perspective, how does it reorient the way I think about this particular issue?

Marriage. I can think about marriage and just go over here and say, here are rules and principles about being married. These are things that we found through surveys that help people be happier in their marriage. So you go over there and you do this stuff in marriage. Or I can say here is the gospel. There is news about what God has done in Christ through the cross by grace with an eschatological focus and, in fact, my marriage fits into this picture. How so? Well, the book of Ephesians makes that very clear, doesn't it? I am speaking to you about Christ and the Church. That is what he says at the end of his discourse about marriage. Wives, be submissive to your husbands as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. Why? Well, because over in Ephesians chapter one and chapter two and chapter three we saw that the whole of life and the whole of the gospel is about Christ and his Church and its unity. If you love Christ and his Church and what his church to be unified, and you view your marriage as a living, breathing picture then here is how you exemplify that in the context of a marriage that is devoted to the gospel, not just devoted to having peace in your house, a huge difference between the two.

One last one. Our children. I can go over here and focus on how I get my children to behave a certain way. Or I can look at it through the lens of the gospel and what it is that we are trying to accomplish. There is news of what God has done in Christ through the cross by grace that gives us our eschatological hope. And what I am doing today,

tomorrow, the next day as a father of children is rooted in, grounded in and centered in that, not gospel is how I get saved, parenting needs something more advanced; the gospel is how I get saved, my marriage requires a trained psychotherapist; the gospel is how I get saved, but in politics you have got to make compromises to get along.

Wrong answer, wrong hope, wrong picture. Behold, it is news, I am laying in Zion, God centered, stumbling stone, Christ centered, a rock of offence, it is cross centered, whoever believes in him, Christ centered, will not be put to shame. It is eschatological.

Is this all of the gospel? You will spend eternity marveling over the depths of the riches of God in Christ. But I will tell you what. You keep this in mind. Hold on to this text. Hold on to those {?} and I apologize. I was misleading. I said there were five things. There were actually six. Hope you don't mind, but I threw in your eschatological hope. Man, he says he is going to give me five things and now I have got six things. I was just... I hope you don't mind that, you know, we added that hope, eschatological hope thing, not just for today, but forever. Amen?

We remember that, though, can't we? It is news. It is God centered. It is Christ centered. It is cross centered. It is grace centered. It is eschatological. We don't remember that.

What is the gospel? It is an announcement of what God has done in Christ through the cross by grace to give eternal hope to those who have faith in him. That will do in a pinch.

Let's pray.