

Theological Foundations

Community Bible Fellowship

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. (John 15:5)

The most effective churches are the ones that successfully operate what is commanded in Scripture. This doesn't happen by chance. These churches execute the commands of the Bible because they have intentionally decided to do this. Yet it's not enough to just open the Bible, and say, "ok, let's do this!" The intentionality of churches has to include a plan, a process for how they intend to obey what God has asked of them. In the end, part of this has to include making disciples.

What is CBF's plan to accomplish these things? What is the process by which CBF can honestly say that they have obeyed God and made disciples? The following is an attempt to explain this process to ensure that CBF has a plan moving forward to change lives for the Kingdom of God and see them become citizens and fellow members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19).

Before you can lay out the plan/process in its entirety, there must be a strong foundation for such endeavors. The only foundation worthy to be built on is the Truth of God's Word. This is where this process begins.

CBF will be borrowing the outline of a process discussed in Tim Keller's book, *Center Church*. In this process, there is a great deal of time looking at and thinking about things pertaining to CBF in an intentional way. This intentionality has included thinking about 3 things: (See Tim Keller's *Center Church*, p. 20)

- **Theological Foundation** – (What to Believe) Timeless truths from the Bible about God, our relationship to Him, and His purposes in the world.
- **Theological Vision** – (How to See) A faithful restatement of the Gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history.
- **Ministry Expressions** – (What to Do) How is the Gospel expressed in a particular church in one community at a point in time.

In this document, the Theological Foundation necessary for Community Bible Fellowship to thrive will be discussed.

For CBF to thrive, the church's theology, vision, ministry, & culture must be **centered around the Gospel**. The rest of this document is going to discuss the Gospel and its importance in the life of a church.

The entire Bible, from Genesis – Revelation, is conveying the Gospel message. In the first 3 chapters of Genesis, the Bible conveys how God made everything good and then mankind rebelled against God by sinning. The rest of the Bible is God's plan to redeem mankind and then ultimately restore all of Creation through His Son Jesus Christ. In the story of the Bible, the Gospel is conveyed through the 4 main areas of Redemptive History:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Restoration

What we are going to find is that all of church life, all discipleship endeavors, and all ministry efforts by the church collectively and the individuals within the church flow from the Gospel. Therefore, understanding the Gospel becomes imperative. How can you expect to operate the Gospel if you don't understand it? One of the things that becomes apparent quickly is there has to be a correlation between the work of the church and the Gospel. There has to be a correlation between the work of the church and its theology. Theology is NOT a stuffy, boring teaching on doctrine. Rather, theology is extremely practical. This applies to individuals as much as churches – you only do what you believe to be true. Effective churches understand this truth. They understand that an effective methodology (what a churches does) comes from a strong theological foundation (what a church believes). Look at how Ligon Duncan describes the connection between theology and ministry in the life of a church:

“...They understand the connection between theology and ministry, truth and practice, doctrine and church life. There are many in evangelicalism today who see no connection between theology and methodology (or who do not ground their method adequately in their theology). The motto seems to be ‘Fixed in our theology but flexible in our methodology.’ Now flexibility, is all good and fine, but is there any connection between what we believe and how we minister, between the gospel and our methodology, between truth and discipleship? If so, you wouldn't know it from the slogan. Christian ministry is informed by Christian doctrine and is therefore not infinitely flexible. The late James Boice, who served as President of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and founded the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, often said this about the connection between theology and methodology: **‘What you win them by, you win them to.’** His point was the way we go about making a disciple will determine the kind of disciple we make. Our methods teach a theology whether or not we realize it. So two questions are always appropriate to ask about our methods: (1) What are our methods teaching our people, and (2) Are our methods Biblical; that is, are they derived from the Scriptures and sufficiently related to the gospel?” (Ligon Duncan, *The Unadjusted Gospel*, pp. 11-12)

Since there is a connection between the Gospel and ultimately the ministry expression of the church, then making the time to better understand what the Bible teaches about the Gospel is critical. In order to

better understand the Gospel and thus the Theological Foundation for Community Bible Fellowship, this document will cover 5 Theological Subjects:

- God
- Mankind
- Christ
- Response
- Future Hope

Let's start with a solid theology of God as this doctrinal topic relates to the Gospel.

God

Let's take a look at 5 attributes of God that will help to better understand the Gospel:

- Holiness
- Love
- Justice
- Sovereign
- Creator

Side Note: This is NOT a complete or comprehensive take on the doctrine of God. For example, there are other attributes of God not listed in this document that could be discussed. Things like God's omnipresence, omnipotence, His eternality, or even His omniscience. Those things are not covered in this document. The 5 attributes being discussed are the ones that relate most directly to understanding how a solid theology of God relates to a better understanding of the Gospel.

Let's begin with a hypothetical question. What if someone asked you to explain who God is and in addition to this explanation, this person wanted to know if God has any direct connection or relation to the Gospel itself? Think about it for a moment. How would you answer this question? What would you say?

This may surprise you but part of Jesus' mission on Earth was to explain who God is. John 1:18 conveys this truth. Take a look at what it has to say:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he (Jesus) has made him known. (John 1:18)

In other words, according to John 1:18, a part of everything that Jesus does is to explain God. Part of Jesus' mission on Earth was to tie His teaching, His ministry, His love and ultimately His redemptive work

to the very character of God. Part of the purpose of this Theological Foundation document is to help believers and especially CBF to see the connection between a good, solid theology of God to the Gospel. Everything that follows is an attempt to do exactly that.

Holiness

God is morally perfect and has NEVER sinned and NEVER will. God's character is founded in Holiness. This means the essence of His character is eternal righteousness. Because this is true, there is none that can even compare to the greatness and grandeur of God. (Ex. 15:11; Psalm 29:1-2; Rev 4) God is a category of one, all by Himself. This is why the first of the 10 commandments in Exodus 20, is that “you shall have no other gods before me.” There is none that has earned the right to be placed before the Most High. God and God alone is deserving of eternal worship and praise.

God does NOT have an identity crisis. God knows that He is great and does not lower His standards for anyone. While this sounds arrogant, this is actually the best thing for mankind. Let me explain. God’s Holiness is actually mankind’s only shot at freedom and peace. Because God is Holy, for Him to speak, act, or believe in any other manner would be un-Holy and therefore sin. He is the only One who can make a claim to Holiness based on His own character and actions (sinless perfection). Of His own divine will, God made a way to extend His Holiness to mankind (more on this when Christ is discussed). It’s only in God gifting His righteousness to mankind, that people can ever be truly free.

Righteousness/Holiness (moral perfection) is God’s choice and standard for being in relationship with Him. Since God is Holy, He does NOT lower this standard for anyone. This will be important to remember as the doctrine of mankind and Christ are both discussed.

Important Takeaways for God’s Holiness:

- God is morally perfect and completely without sin
- God’s Holiness is mankind’s only shot at freedom and peace
- Holiness/Righteousness is God’s standard for being in relationship with Him.

Justice

Since God is Holy, He is also totally & completely fair in all of His dealings. Just to be clear, He does not punish people unnecessarily and He does not allow people to “slide by” on their sin. His Holiness also compels Him to seek Justice in all things. Without God pursuing justice, He is not Holy. If He is not just, then He is not Holy and consequently, He is not God. Therefore God’s Holy character demands justice.

Because God is just, His justice demands that He punish sin. There is NO WAY around this!! A Holy and just God must punish sin. The reason a place called Hell exists is because of the justice of God. Justice

seeks Truth and what is absolutely right. Justice does not and cannot give sin a pass. Justice is the execution of God's righteous character and the logical outcome of His Holiness.

Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross is God's ultimate display of Justice (more on this in a minute). Justice sounds brutal but there is a beautiful flip side to God's justice. While there's a part of God's justice that should be sobering to every person, His justice is also a pathway to grace. (Is. 30:18) If God makes a way for you to be saved (and He has), then you can rest assured that He has done so in a way that is both Holy and Just. If the righteous and just Judge of all men declares you holy and blameless, then you are truly free from any wrongdoing.

Important Takeaways for God's justice:

- God is completely fair in all things because of His Holy character.
- God's justice demands that sin must be punished.
- God's justice is the pathway to grace.

Love

Here's an attribute of God that people find most appealing. God is Love! This is God's defining characteristic (1 John 4:7-10). Of all the things that God could be, love is the thing that most accurately defines Him to a fallen mankind. Ephesians 2:4 tells us that "God is rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us." If you could have God be rich in any one thing, what would you hope that He would be "rich in"? What an incredible Biblical truth that God is rich in MERCY!! Why? Because He kinda-sorta loved us? NO!! Because of the GREAT love with which He loved us.

God's love is not a flimsy, emotional, feel-good, flippant love. His love is based in His Holiness and Justice. Both Holiness and Justice always seek for what is true. That means there is an important relationship between Truth & Love. God's Love is properly balanced with Truth. God's Holiness and Justice means that each individual is fully known – like everything every person has ever done. So God knows the good, the bad, & the ugly about each person walking the face of the Earth. When people understand this about God, the first reaction is to be terrified. God knows everything about me? Oh wow, I'm in big trouble! Instead of fear (perfect love casts out fear), God wants mankind to think on His perfect love this way:

- To be loved but not known, is comforting but ultimately superficial.
- To be known but not loved, is every person's worst fear.
- To be truly known and fully loved is the kind of love that only God can accomplish. It is His great love with which He loved us.

This is the way in which God has decided to love mankind. It's the Romans 5:8 demonstration of love. God didn't wait to love mankind when people got their act together. God loved them at their worst – while they were yet sinners. God decided to love every person when they had not earned it or deserved it. "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16)

At this point, let's address a common misunderstanding about God and His love for mankind. The misconception is that He made mankind to fill a void or need in Himself. It goes something like this - God was lonely, so He created mankind for fellowship. Here's why this isn't true, God is complete in Himself, lacking in nothing. God in his triune revelation of Himself (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) is complete and in need of nothing else. God didn't create mankind, whom He knew would be sinful, in the hopes that people would someday wake up and realize how great He is. That's simply not true.

So why did God create mankind? Here's one of the most mind-blowing revelations of the Bible. God doesn't need mankind. He simply wants us!! The Bible does not reveal why this is true, it simply states over and over again that God pursues people with a great and incomprehensible love. (Luke 15)

Important Takeaways for God's Love:

- God is Love! It's His most defining characteristic.
- God's love is properly balanced with truth.
- God's love is demonstrated when people are at their worst. God doesn't wait to love people when they have their acts together.
- God did not make mankind because He was alone and needed fellowship.
- God doesn't need people. He simply wants them.

Sovereign

This is the attribute of God that many people wonder if it was even necessary to describe this. In other words, doesn't everyone know this about God? Is there anyone that really has a problem with the sovereignty of God? Yet, it's incredibly important to be clear and transparent about these matters.

God's sovereignty essentially means that God is in charge of all things at all times. God has eternally been in control of all things!! There will NEVER be a time or a place in which God is not in control of all things. There is nothing that exists or transpires without it being the will of God. (Psalm 115:3)

Most believers usually refer to God's sovereignty in some of life's most difficult moments with statements like, "God is still on His throne." The obvious thing being said is that God is in charge of ALL things. Since this is true, it's important to be reminded of some obvious but difficult things with God's sovereignty. God is sovereign over good things that occur to people. Yet God is also sovereign over the difficult trials and even human suffering. Many times, human suffering doesn't make sense. Yet we're reminded in Scripture that God is even sovereign over people's suffering. Look no further than the book of Job. Look no further than Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. The Bible reminds believers that God's ways are Higher than our ways. (Isa. 55:8-9). While there may be circumstances that are difficult to understand, a believer should be reminded that a kind and generous God has charge of these difficult moments.

Here's the other thing about God's sovereignty, God doesn't owe anyone, anything. God doesn't owe anyone an explanation. Let's never forget who we are, in light of who God is. Since we have a God who is rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us (Eph. 2:4), then people can trust that God has their best at heart, even in the difficult moments.

Here's another misconception about God's sovereignty that happens with some people. There are some that believe they can bargain with God, especially when it comes to their lives. In most instances, these people want a certain thing or outcome and so they pray for God to accept their lives as collateral on the granting of this wish. It goes something like, "God if you get me out of this problem, then I will go to Africa as a missionary." The truth is that people can't put God into their debt. There will never be a time when an individual has anything with which they can bargain with God, including their lives. This is true especially since God has already created/owns/rules all things. This is Paul's meaning in Romans 11:33-36. There will never be a time where God owes anyone anything.

The most beautiful thing about God's sovereignty is that He IS IN CONTROL of every situation. This means that the believer doesn't have to concern themselves with most issues in life. The natural, knee-jerk reaction is to try to control every situation in life. God reminds His church that He's still in control and therefore believers should not concern themselves with such matters. For the believers who learn this beautiful truth, life becomes far more liberating. Life becomes an opportunity to pursue the things of God rather than a burden to be managed. Things like whether or not my co-workers like me or the person driving slow in the left lane become trivial matters. Yet if every moment of every day is about me (our natural position due to our sin nature), then I have to carry the burden of attempting to control all matters in my life. How exhausting! Yet this is where most Christians spin their wheels – attempting to follow Jesus by ignoring His sovereignty and trying to control every situation in their lives. The loving reminder is that God's sovereignty actually frees the believer to pursue the will of God.

Important Takeaways for God's Sovereignty:

- God is in charge of all things at all times. This has always been true, is true, and forever will be true.
- God is even sovereign over trials, difficulties, and suffering.
- Since God is sovereign, He doesn't owe anyone anything and people cannot put Him into their debt.
- God's sovereignty frees the believer to pursue the will of God.

Creator

Everything that exists, has existed, or ever will exist was created by God. In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth. (Gen. 1:1) God made everything by speaking it into existence. God created everything that exists out of nothing. Just to be clear, there is nothing that exists that God did not create. The Gospel of John informs people that Christ was the agent through which creation occurred. (John 1:1-

3) Creation becomes the means, the setting by which God would express His love to mankind. One of the tragic effects of the Fall is that mankind came to love/serve/worship the creation rather than the Creator. (Rom 1:25)

God's creation even extends to people and the circumstances of their lives. Since God is both sovereign and the Creator of the universe, everything that exists, exists because God ordained it. Before the foundation of the world, God knew every person that would exist. Maybe on some level, people can understand what that means but here's the truth that a person can spend hours warping their brain. God not only knew every person that would exist, but He also designed the reason, the place, and the ways that they would interact with others at that specific time historically. What this means is that no one is an accident. No one is a mistake. Maybe their parents weren't planning on them showing up when they did but it was NOT a surprise to God. It also means that the people you interact with (some for the good & others not so much) are there because God ordained it.

Since God is the Creator, He not only created the physical world but also designed the institutions and systems that are a part of people's lives. He designed these things to work in a way that lines up with His character. For example, things like sex, marriage, government, & church, were designed by God to benefit people in specific ways. Since He made these things, He also owns those things. Since He made these things, His church can trust that He designed those things for human flourishing. So, when those things are operated in a manner consistent with what He has commanded, those things lead to our good. When those same good things get used for selfish and even evil designs by mankind, they wreak hurt and destruction like few things can. They bring hurt and destruction because they are executed/operated in a manner outside of the boundaries of God's good design for those things. This means that no one gets to redefine these things, including the culture at large.

Important Takeaways for God as Creator:

- God created everything that exists. Everything!
- God's creative abilities even stretch to the circumstances and events of people's lives.
- God also created human institutions and systems for human flourishing. When operated outside of God's good design, these institutions and systems wreak havoc and destruction.

At this point, some may be thinking, "what does any of this have to do with the Gospel?" The answer is – plenty!!! There is no Gospel without a firm understanding of who God is. As an example of why this is important, look at Acts 17:24-27. In this passage, Paul is presenting the Gospel to a group of Pagan scholars and philosophers in Athens at a location called Mars Hill. This group would not be familiar with the Hebrew God nor the Old Testament. Notice how Paul weaves a solid theology of God into his Gospel presentation:

Acts 17:24-27

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, {creation} being Lord of heaven and earth, {sovereignty} does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though

he needed anything, {sovereignty} since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. {love} ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, {creation} having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, {sovereignty} ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. {love} Yet he is actually not far from each one of us {love}

The Apostle Paul felt it critical to include a solid theology of God into His explanation of the Gospel. What Paul is demonstrating is that God is an integral part of the Gospel and not distinct from it.

The next theological topic to be discussed is mankind.

Mankind

****In this document, the term “mankind” refers to both male and female individuals.**

Let's take a look at a couple of subjects that will help to better understand the Biblical doctrine of mankind:

- Mankind is made in the image of God (Imago Dei)
- Mankind is sinful and fallen

Mankind is a beautiful dichotomy of conflicting realities. On one hand, mankind is the pinnacle of creation. By making mankind (male and female) in His own image, God signaled His desire to have a special kind of relationship with mankind. The Imago Dei is not reason for a sense of pride or certainly not blatant arrogance. This is simply a reality that the Bible communicates. Bearing the Imago Dei gives mankind an incredible potential to do so much good in the context of God's created order. Yet, that's not what happens. On the other hand, mankind rebelled against God by disobeying Him (Gen 3). As a result, sin and death entered the world. Because of this, every person lives in a Genesis 3 world, where sin has reached into all of creation and fractured it in horrendous ways. Worse yet, every person is born with a sin nature. A nature that is bent on rebelling against the things of God and simultaneously making much of themselves. Mankind is this walking, talking conflicting reality – capable of such good things and yet not able to accomplish the righteousness that God demands because by nature they are sinners.

Imago Dei

Every person (born & unborn) that has ever lived, is living, or ever will live is created in the image of God. (Gen 1:26-27) This means that people bear something unique and special of God's likeness that no other created thing does. This does not necessarily mean that people “look like” God. It does mean that

people possess something of God's quality that He did not place in any other creature. This places mankind in a category of creation all by himself. Even the Fall of mankind (Adam's sin against God) did NOT cause mankind to lose the Imago Dei. While mankind is diverse in its' cultures, ethnicities, languages, customs, and beliefs, it still maintains the God-given quality of the Imago Dei. In mankind, God's creative variety and distinction are on full display.

The Imago Dei gives every person a special worth and value. While man-made systems (wealth, status, religions, etc) place different values on human life, this was never God's intent. The Imago Dei levels the playing field for all of mankind. It puts everyone that has ever existed in the same place – as an image bearer of the Most High. This means that all of humanity is to be treated with a basic dignity and respect by the people of God. When the church sees humanity, they are commanded to see them the way that God sees them. They are to see the world without partiality (James 2:1-13). This value and dignity even extends to the unborn. So in short, every person needs to be seen, loved and treated as one bearing the Imago Dei.

This reality has two effects:

1. For the glory of God and in the power provided through Jesus Christ's triumph over sin and death (more about this in a moment), the community/relational aspect of the church should reflect the realities of eternity with Christ as our future hope (Rev 7:9-12). Heaven for all eternity will be made up of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The church, as much as possible, should reflect this reality. This means there is no place for prejudice of any kind, for racism, for the elevation of some at the expense of others, for the unfair practice of distinguishing between the "haves" & "have nots", or any form of special treatment. As a result, the disciple looks for ways to be inclusive and hospitable to all and also seeks ways to diminish the possibilities for division within the church.
2. The church should also be a place where justice issues are brought to the attention of the congregation. The church should be the first to lead out against violations and crimes against human dignity. Issues like abortion, human trafficking, racism of any kind, slavery, and other violations that affect the denigration of the Imago Dei should be communicated and even confronted by the church.

A quick look around the world shows that people have little regard for the Imago Dei in others. In the world today, there were untold numbers of violations against people's dignity and worth. From the war crimes committed in a forgotten war-torn African nation to the disparaging of a 15-year-old girl's worth on social media, people don't treat each other very well. That's just in a single day. Imagine the travesties committed in a month or year. This is where the church has a golden opportunity to be a light in a very dark world. In every way, the church has to be counter-cultural as we serve the King of a upside-down Kingdom (more on this later). For the church that understands the importance of the Imago Dei, they have the chance to show the world that anyone and everyone who comes in contact with CBF will be

treated with dignity and worth. In short, in this place, in this church, they will be safe from the normal junk that transpires in the world around them. They will be seen. They will be loved. They will matter because they bear the Imago Dei. In doing so, CBF will display the truth of the Gospel and help reveal the righteousness of God, all for the glory of God.

Important Takeaways for Mankind being made in the Image of God:

- Every person bears the image of God
- The Imago Dei gives every person a special worth and value
- Knowing this about the Imago Dei, means it affects the church in 2 ways. It affects the way the church relates to one another and it affects the ways in which the church see and pursues matters of justice in the world.
- Because of the Imago Dei, anyone that comes into contact with CBF will be treated with dignity and respect.

Sinful and Fallen

Because of Adam's disobedience against God, sin and thus death entered the world (Gen 3; Rom 5:12). Since that day, every person born is born with a sin nature. This means that every person has something inside of them that wants to put themselves above everyone and everything. As a result of this, everyone openly rebels against God. They punt on the things of God in order to make much of themselves. This happens daily because mankind's default nature is to sin. This is an important theological truth to understand - people are NOT sinners because they sin; they sin because they are already born sinners. It helps people to understand the real issue with sin. People are not God's enemy because they make moral snafus. People are alienated from God because their nature is bent on unrighteousness and evil. These are the polar opposite of God's Holy character and far below his standard for a right relationship with mankind.

At this point, it is important to understand what sin actually is. It's probably important to understand sin from two vantage points: (1) Sin as a willful act of disobedience; (2) Sin as an overriding concept of destruction.

1. Sin as a willful act of disobedience: Sin can be an action, a spoken word, a thought, or even an attitude that stands in contradiction to the perfect law and standard of God. Here's an example of how pervasive sin really is. If an individual breaks into their neighbor's home and steals their possessions, then that act is a sin. This is basic 10 commandments kind of stuff. It's obviously a sin. Using this same example, let's imagine that this thief has not committed the act of stealing yet. Instead, they are only looking at what their neighbor possesses and wishing that they had those things, rather than their neighbor owning it. At this point in time, the act of stealing has not happened; they are only coveting their neighbor's possessions. Coveting is also a sin, the same as if they had broken into the home and actually stolen their neighbor's possessions. In short, sin

can both be actions that someone does or possibly even just thoughts that dominate a person's heart.

2. Sin isn't just an action, spoken word, thought, or attitude. It is also a destructive concept that has its' grip on all of creation because of the Fall of mankind. When Adam disobeyed God, it brought sin and death into the world. From this point, sin and thus death invaded every aspect of creation. Sin and death fractured creation in catastrophic ways. The effects of both can be seen in all of creation.

Here are three verses in the book of Romans that discuss the difference between the two. Notice that Paul is discussing both aspects of sin in the same book (Romans):

For all who have sinned {act} without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned {act} under the law will be judged by the law. (Rom 2:12)

Therefore, just as sin {concept} came into the world through one man, and death through sin, {concept} and so death spread to all men^[a] because all sinned {act} — ¹³for sin {concept} indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin {concept} is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning {act} was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. (Rom 5:12-14)

We know that our old self {sin nature} was crucified with him in order that the body of sin {concept} might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin {concept}. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin {concept}. (Rom 6:6-7)

Every person is born with a sin nature, which means the concept of sin is born into every individual. In other words, before a baby/child ever sins (act), this child already has the DNA of sin within them. For example, all of my children came out of the womb knowing how to lie, steal, bite, hit, deceive, and a hundred other things as well. No one taught them how to lie. No one taught them how to steal another child's toy. No one taught them how to pull hair and bite their siblings on the back. Yet each one of them instinctively knew how to do all of these things. Why? How is this possible? The reality is that they have the imprint of sin within them the moment they enter this world.

Jesus had a distinct way of describing the problem of the concept of sin. Jesus taught that every person has a sick heart. **That sin is always a problem of the heart** (Matthew 15:1-20). If sin is going to be addressed in significant ways, then it must be understood as a problem of the heart. As a church thinks through how it teaches and deals with sin in its congregation, then it must be seen ultimately as a heart problem.

Sin has an evil partner that always travels with it. That evil partner is death. Where you find sin, you will always find death. Where death has occurred, it is the result and consequence of sin. "For the wages of

sin is death...” (Rom 6:23). God gifted mankind eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. God is the only One who can give the gift of life. When an individual is tempted to sin, the temptation sells itself based on the promise that somehow this sin will bring life and flourishing. Temptation and eventually sin is always a lie. Sin cannot bring life. It’s not that sin could bring life and just chooses not to do so. **Sin can’t produce life.** It doesn’t have the ability to produce anything good. Sin only brings death and destruction – every single time! The lie is that sin will benefit you and make your life better. The reality is that sin will tear your life and your world apart because that’s all it can do. Yet, that’s exactly what mankind finds itself doing over and over again.

Because mankind has a sin nature, people will fall prey to the sins of Pride & Idolatry. In fact, these two sins will serve as the foundation for all of mankind’s other sins. Why? Instead of worshipping God in all of their lives where people make much of the Most High, the sin nature compels them to worship and serve themselves rather than God. By living this way, people are committing the sins of pride and idolatry. Most people would try to deny this reality. The fact remains that people will demonstrate in the way they live that God is secondary to themselves. To take it a step further, most people live as if they know better than God and don’t need anyone or anything to speak into how they live their lives.

Sin is so pervasive and so destructive that it affects the way people prioritize their loves. A person’s first love and highest priority in life should be to love God with everything they are and have (Deut. 6:4-5; Matt. 22:37-40). When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, his answer was to piece together two separate Old Testament scripture (Deut. 6 & Lev 19), to let people know that the priority always has to be a love of God. Once that love is first and foremost, then all other proper loves flow from this first love, including important things like love of neighbor. When God gave the 10 commandments to the Israelites on Mt. Sanai, what was commandment #1? Essentially, that the Israelites were to have no other gods that came as a priority above the One, True God. Once the 1st commandment was established, then the possibility of having a right relationship with God and my fellow man increased greatly. Being a sinner by nature, doesn’t allow for a lifetime of correctly prioritizing an individual’s loves. Sin disorders the proper loves, where people take good things and love them more than they love God. People love money and children and things and definitely themselves more than they love God. As a result of these disordered loves, even good and beautiful things become distorted objects that are worshipped and adored rather than God. In doing so, people have these misguided hopes in these things. The belief is that whatever is loved more than God, can somehow provide good things. People would never say these things out loud, but they live as if they know better than God. They live as if their view of what their lives should be is more significant than living out the commands and precepts that Scripture clearly commands. This is the sin of pride and idolatry. These sins like any other sin wreak death and destruction rather than life and flourishing. This is what happens when people live sin-guided lives of disordered loves. In short, when people prioritize a love of God over created things, then the possibility exists for harmony and flourishing in life. When people prioritize creation over the Creator, then death and disorder are not far behind. (Rom 1:25)

Properly Ordered Loves

Disordered Loves

GOD

Creation

Creation

GOD

Teaching both the doctrines of Imago Dei & Depravity communicates a realistic view of the Gospel. In both doctrines, there is a balance that is struck between the hope that God provides and the seriousness with which sin must be conveyed and understood. To neglect one for the other is to present an unbalanced Gospel. Look at how Mark Deaver communicates this truth:

“When our churches confess that humans are made in the image of God and that humans are fallen and depraved, we offer a compelling and accurate description of human nature. It captures the good and the bad. The simple ability to understand ourselves and our world in such realistic terms will both bring sanity and commend the gospel. It will discourage our churches from being glibly triumphalistic or morbidly pessimistic. And we pastors must lead the way in trying to cultivate the appropriate humility within ourselves, as we confess our sins to God and to our brothers and sisters.

Without a community built to teach, understand, and live in the light of these twin truths, our real problem will be left undiagnosed. It is our understanding of human sin, combined with an understanding of God’s goodness and righteousness, that sets up the human problem – how can we sinners be accepted by such a holy, loving, and good God?” (Mark Deaver, *The Unadjusted Gospel*, p. 23)

Deaver’s last question sets up the leap into what Christ has done on our behalf. Before moving onto the person and work of Christ, let’s be reminded of some important takeaways from mankind as a sinner.

Important Takeaways for Mankind Being a Sinner:

- Every person is born with a sin nature. This means mankind’s default position in life is to sin.
- Sin has this dual aspect. The Bible talks about sin as both (1) something you do and are responsible for doing; (2) A concept that has horrifically altered all of creation.
- Sin is ALWAYS a matter of the heart
- Sin is always accompanied by death. Where you find one, you will always find the other.
- People always fall prey to the sins of pride & idolatry. These 2 sins are foundational to all other sins.
- Sin causes people to have disordered loves, where people love other stuff more than they love God.

Christ

Think back for a moment to the theology of God. One of the truths about God is that He is Holy. His standard for relationship with mankind is perfect, sinless, righteousness. Mankind's problem is that they are anything but righteous. In fact, they are the polar opposite of righteousness. This is true because they are born with a sin nature. A nature that is bent toward simultaneously serving themselves and disobeying God. Because God is Holy and mankind is not, then mankind is in great peril. Here's what the Bible says awaits unrighteous mankind:

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,...
(Rom 1:18)**

If a person has grown up in church most of their life, then they have probably heard the phrase, "Jesus saves people from their sins". For these individuals, the term, "Jesus saves" has probably lost its' gravity and seriousness. If a person needs to be saved from something or anything for that matter, then this means the individual is in some kind of peril or danger. What the Bible is communicating is that mankind is in the most desperate kind of danger. In their unrighteous state, mankind is in the crosshairs of the wrath of God. Worse yet, there is absolutely nothing mankind can do about this situation on his/her own. What mankind needed most was someone who could save them from their desperate sinful state. God, being rich in mercy, did exactly that through His Son Jesus Christ. (Eph. 2:1-10)

Let's take a look at a couple of subjects that will help to better understand the Biblical doctrine of Christ:

- The Person of Christ
- The Work of Christ

The Person of Christ

The Person of Jesus Christ describes **who Jesus is**. What does the Bible have to say about who Jesus is?

Here are a few Biblical truths about who Jesus is:

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. This means that Jesus shares all of the attributes of God, because He Himself is God. (John 1:1-5)
- Jesus was born of a virgin. (Isa. 7:14; Matt 1:18, 25; Luke 1:34-35) The purpose of the virgin birth is to show that Jesus' appearing and incarnation are the work of God and nothing in which mankind could take credit. Jesus appearing on the Earth for the first time was the work of God and God alone. This event does not elevate Mary to any special place or order among mankind, rather the Bible conveys her incredible faithfulness in being a servant of God in a special and unique circumstance.
- Jesus is both fully God and fully man at the same time. Jesus is NOT God in a man costume. He is 100% man and at the same time, He is 100% God. Since Jesus is fully God, He also shares all of God's attributes (holy, loving, just, sovereign, etc). Since Jesus is also fully man, He has

experienced what it means to live life and has also been tempted in all things as we are, yet He experienced those temptations without sinning. (Heb 4:14-16)

- Through Jesus' work (more on this in a minute), He also has some unique titles. Some of these titles include, the Great "I Am" (John 8:52-59), The Alpha & Omega (Rev 1:8 Rev 22:13), the only Mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim 2:5), & the Redeemer of mankind (Eph 1:7).

These truths help us to better understand and see these qualities in Jesus. In other words, these characteristics help the reader to better understand who Jesus is. Here are some qualities that Jesus demonstrates consistently throughout the four Gospels.

- **Compelling Kindness & Love** – Jesus demonstrates a compelling kindness and love throughout his earthly ministry. His kindness draws people to him and convinces them to both trust Jesus and draw near to him, even in the most trying of circumstances. Here are a few examples (Luke 19:1-10; John 8:1-11; Luke 7:36-50)
- **His Disdain for Religious Posturing** – The people that drew Jesus' ire more than any other group were the religious elite. They believed that their religious posturing and showmanship would score them brownie points with God. In these moments, there was no real devotion from the heart, no real love of God in these moments. By doing this, they were ignoring and possibly missing the most important command – to love God with everything we are and everything we have. Time and again, Jesus makes the point that this kind of religious posturing will not be tolerated by God. Here are a few examples of Jesus' disdain for religious posturing (Matthew 23, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:45-47)

Sidenote: Our sin problems are not fixed by becoming more religious. They are resolved by leaning into what Jesus has already provided in the Gospel. We sin because we love the idols that are present in our lives more than we love God. The solution to this is developing a deeper long-term love for Jesus Christ.

- **His treatment of Sin & His willingness to Distribute Grace** – John tells us in his prologue to his gospel that Jesus brought both grace and truth (John 1:17). Jesus was both kind to sinners and honest about their spiritual condition. Think back to the doctrine of God's Holiness & Justice. God does NOT soft-sell sin. He does NOT let people skate by or even overlook their sin. God does the most loving thing possible – He acknowledges/addresses the sin and then offers Himself as the solution. Since Jesus came to explain God, this is exactly how Jesus addresses sin in people's lives. In offering Himself as the solution, Jesus often calls them to serve His Kingdom rather than condemning them for their immorality. Here are a few examples of Jesus' treatment of sin & His willingness to distribute grace. (Matt 9:1-8, Matt 12:33-37, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:1-11, John 9)

Sidenote: The most loving thing the church can do with people's sin is to follow Jesus' example. Sin cannot be ignored but must also be addressed with an abundance of grace. Churches must find loving ways to confront sin and even discipline their congregations.

Important Takeaways for the Person of Christ:

- The Person of Christ describes WHO Jesus is
- There are a number of truths that the Bible conveys about Jesus (fully God/fully man, equal with God, born of a virgin, etc)
- There are a number of qualities of Jesus that the Bible communicates (compelling kindness & love, disdain for religious posturing, etc)

The Work of Christ

For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, **he has made him known.** (John 1:16-18)

I am the Way, the Truth, & the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. **From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.** (John 14:6-7)

The Work of Christ describes **WHAT Jesus did**. According to John 1, part of what Christ did was to make God known. In a sense, Jesus' mission was to save mankind by pointing them to the reality of who God already is. The work of Christ ties together the reality of both who God already is and mankind's desperate, perilous, sinful situation. Another way of looking at this same truth is to remember that what Jesus did flows out of Who Jesus is. People should keep this in mind as they think upon what Christ has done for them.

The Bible says that Jesus took on flesh & became a man (John 1:14). This is known as Jesus' Incarnation - the moment that God came to be with us. (Matt 1:23) It is the moment that God invaded an enemy-occupied world. It is the moment when the One beyond time encroached on human history. Because of the great love with which He loved mankind, God would not leave humanity to its own devices, but rather chose to save them. He decided to save mankind by sending His One & Only Son to die for them, to die in their place. (John 3:16) Not only did God save sinful mankind from his sin but also chose to make mankind family by making them joint heirs with Christ. (Gal. 4:4-7) Because of Jesus' Holiness, He lived a perfect, sinless life. Jesus' moral perfection gave Him the earned, right standing with God. This made Jesus the only acceptable, eternal sacrifice to die in the place of mankind and restore sinful man back to God. In dying on the Cross, Christ absorbed God's wrath by taking on the sin of mankind, He died in the place of mankind, and paid the sin debt that humanity owed in order to satisfy God's justice and Holiness. On the 3rd day, Jesus rose from the dead proving He had conquered sin and death. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended back to the Father.

Since God is Holy, He demands that anyone wanting to be in right relationship with Him must also be Holy. This standard proved too much for sinful mankind. There was no way that mankind would ever be able to justify himself before God on his own merit. This meant that for mankind to be justified before God (found morally without fault or error) then God would have to intervene. Jesus coming to Earth as a baby was how God intervened. During His lifetime, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless existence. In doing so, this made Jesus not only the perfect sacrifice for sinful mankind but the only One capable of being able to stand in the gap and be the Mediator between sinful mankind and the One & Only Holy God. (1 Tim 2:5)

Jesus set out to accomplish the will of His Father. His life's goal was to do what His Father had asked of Him. Jesus saw His incarnation as a mission from His Father and His intention was to live, act, minister & love in line with the character & commands of God. Here are a few examples from Scripture:

Our Father who art in Heaven

Hallowed be Thy Name

Your Kingdom come

Your will be done,

On Earth, as it is in Heaven... (Matt 6:9-10)

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. ³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:19-30)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. (John 17:1-5)

So Jesus' work included making God known, accomplishing the will of His Father, and ultimately to be the perfect sacrifice for sinful mankind. So why did Jesus' morally perfect and sin free life make Him an acceptable sacrifice before God? To understand this best, an individual must first understand some facts about the OT sacrificial system as laid out in the Law of Moses.

Remember, God does NOT change. He is who He is. Because this is true, Holiness and Justice are at the forefront of His character. This was very much on display in the Old Testament Law. In the same way, God's character was on display in the life and work of Jesus Christ. There are 3 passages in the Old Testament that will help explain what Christ accomplished in His death and resurrection.

Exodus 12 (The Passover)

There is no clearer picture of the Gospel in the Old Testament than the Exodus story. God's people are enslaved to the Egyptians (like we are to sin). God sends a deliverer (Moses) to rescue the people of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. In Jesus, God sent the greater Deliverer, the greater Moses to deliver His people from sin & death. God accomplishes a rescue for His people that they could never accomplish for themselves. (just like Jesus accomplished for us on the Cross).

In Exodus 12, the people of Israel are given instructions on the Passover shortly before the Exodus occurs. Each household was to take a one-year-old male Lamb without blemish (Ex 12:5). There were specific instructions on what to do with the animal:

- The blood of the lamb was to be put on the two doorposts of the house.
- The lamb was to be roasted on fire, eaten with leavened bread & bitter herbs
- There were only certain parts of the lamb to be eaten & the remains were left until morning and then burned.
- They were to eat the meal, dressed, packed & ready to leave

When the Lord sent the angel of death as the last of ten plagues on the Egyptians, that angel "passed over" any home with the lamb's blood on the doorposts. The Gospel tie in = it was the blood of the lamb that saved God's people from experiencing the death of their first born. When John the Baptist called Jesus, "the Lamb of God", he had this analogy of the Passover in mind.

The next day when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold, **the Lamb** of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Leviticus 4 (Sin Offering)

Leviticus is usually not on the list of people's favorite books of the Bible to read. One of the great themes of Leviticus is God's Holiness. The book goes to great lengths to show God's Holiness, mankind's matters of the heart and their intent in sinning, and the great lengths that God created for sinful mankind to

maintain a relationship with God. Rather than dodging the issue or try to sweep the matter under the rug, Leviticus tackles the million-dollar question for mankind – what must occur for people to be in right relationship with God after they have sinned? Because of God’s Holiness and Justice, something (animal) was made to pay for that sin.

Leviticus 4 lays out the instructions for the sin offering – the offering was made to God after people had sinned. Take note of the total destruction of the animal. The law required that a bull be offered. If the person could not afford a bull, then the law allowed for a goat/lamb/ram or even a turtledove for the poor. Here is what the law required of an individual who had committed a sin, even one unintentionally. This is what occurred to the animal (Lev 4)

- Must be a Bull w/out blemish
- Bull is killed at the entrance to the tent
- Blood is sprinkled 7 times in the tent before the veil & then on the horns of the altar
- All the blood is poured out at the altar & the fat is removed & the kidneys. These organs are burned on the altar
- The rest of the bull carcass (skin, head, legs, entrails, & dung) would be carried outside the camp, to a clean place, on an ash heap & the remains would be burned. In other words, the animal was completely used up and destroyed in this offering.

The Gospel tie-in for Leviticus 4 = Jesus is the eternal, ultimate sin offering. His blood was shed so that mankind’s sins would be forgiven. (Heb 9:22) In going to the cross, Jesus met all the requirements of a sin offering. He was sinless/perfect & obviously without blemish. His blood is shed profusely and His body is destroyed on the Cross, outside the city or outside the camp.

Leviticus 16 (Day of Atonement)

In Leviticus 16 there are instructions for the Day of Atonement. This was the one day annually where the nation of Israel made an offering to God to atone for their sins over the course of the past year. This was done annually to make amends for the sins of the people of Israel. The Jewish people still celebrate this day and it usually occurs during the month of September. On your calendar, it will appear as Yom Kippur (Hebrew for the Day of Atonement). Notice how seriously this passage takes God’s Holiness in the ceremonial necessities to atone for the nation’s sin.

The Day of Atonement (Lev 16)

- Notice the seriousness of God’s Holiness (Lev 10:1-3 & 16:1-2)
- God makes a ceremonial way for Aaron to enter the Holy Place, on one specific day, at one specific time, and in one specific way. (16:3)
- Here’s the list of animals Aaron would need to bring:
 - has to bring a bull as a sin offering (for himself & his household)
 - a ram as a burnt offering
 - from the congregation, 2 male goats for a sin offering

- another ram for a burnt offering
- Here's the procedure & garments Aaron had to wear in order to enter the Holy Place. These are described as "Holy" garments (Lev 16:4)
 - He would first bathe (ceremonial cleanse himself) & then put on the following garments
 - Linen undergarment
 - "Holy" Linen coat (Holy = set apart for specific/special reasons)
 - Linen sash tied around his waist
 - Linen turban
- The first thing Aaron does is offer the bull as a sin offering for himself & his house. Why? Aaron, first had to cleanse himself from sin (make atonement) before he could carry on w/this Holy ceremony.
- Second, Aaron places the 2 male goats before the entrance of the tent (just on the outside of the Holy space) and casts lots over them: one lot for the Lord & one lot for Azazel (either a location or possibly the name of a demon). The person who releases the "scapegoat" to Azazel, then must wash both his clothes and his body in water, and then & only then was that person allowed back into the camp. (Lev 16:26)
- Aaron offers the bull (sin offering) so he can enter the Holy Place
- Then he takes a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and he takes 2 handfuls of sweet incense (beaten small) & he brings it inside the veil. Aaron puts the incense on the fire before the Lord, so that the cloud of incense will cover the mercy seat (that is over the testimony) so that Aaron won't DIE!!!
- He then takes the blood of the bull (his sin offering) & sprinkles it (with his finger) 7 times on the front of the mercy seat on the east side & in front of the mercy seat.
- Then, Aaron kills the goat as a sin offering over which the lot fell to the Lord. He does with the blood of the goat, the same as he did with the bull – sprinkles its' blood 7 times over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. (The bull is atonement for Aaron's sin. The goat is atonement for the entire nation of Israel's sin)
- No one can be in the Holy Place with Aaron while this is taking place. Once he has completed these tasks in the Holy Place, he will return to the altar (near the entrance of the tent) and make atonement for the altar. Takes the blood of the bull & then the goat, spreads it on the horn of the altar and then sprinkles it on the altar in order to consecrate it from the sin and uncleanness of the people of Israel.
- Once he has made atonement for the Holy Place, the tent of meeting, & the altar, Aaron then presents the live goat. Aaron lays both his hands on the head of the goat, confess over it the iniquities, the transgressions, & the sins of Israel. He then ceremonially places those sins on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness with the help of a man chosen to release the goat. The goat bears all the sins of Israel and is released into the wilderness and away from the camp.
- Then Aaron enters the tent again, removes his garments, leaves them there, and bathes again in a holy place, puts the garments back on, comes back out to offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of Israel (the rams). Along with the rams being burnt, the sin offering's fat is also burned. As is the case in sin offerings, the leftover carcass is taken outside the camp and burned.

- The guy who does the burning of leftover material outside the camp, then must both wash his clothes and bathe his body and then and only then is he permitted to enter the camp again.
- The Day of Atonement is treated as a Sabbath for the nation of Israel. No work. An annual event where Israel comes before the Lord to atone for their sins.

Over time, the High Priest would wear his linen garments with bells on them and a rope tied around his waist. In doing this, the people could pull out the body of the High Priest should God decide to strike him dead, since no one else could enter the Holy Place. The Day of Atonement was a solemn serious day, in which God's grace allowed for the nation of Israel to atone for their sins.

Gospel tie-in = Hebrews chapters 9 & 10. Hebrews has been called the greatest commentary ever written on the book of Leviticus. In Hebrews 9 & 10, the believer is allowed to see Jesus' priestly role as He accomplished eternally the atonement of all of mankind's sins. Jesus is the eternal High Priest, who by His own blood entered the Heavenly Holy Place and made atonement for the sin of all mankind, once and for all.

Here's something else that needs to be mentioned about the Law: the Law is NOT a bad thing. It shows two different things simultaneously. The Law showed God's standard of Holiness, His Righteous demands for being in right relationship with Him. The other thing it demonstrated was that sinful mankind could not keep the Law. The demands of the Law were impossible for mankind to keep. Man didn't need a better Law. They needed a better Law-keeper. Jesus became that on mankind's behalf. Jesus accomplished in His lifetime what sinful man could NEVER do. He sinlessly, perfectly kept every aspect of the Law and therefore was the perfect sacrifice for sinful mankind.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17)

Historical/Biblical Facts Surrounding Jesus' Death & Resurrection:

- Last Supper (Celebrating the Passover – coincidence? Definitely NOT!!)
- Trials (3 Trials – Sanhedrin, Herod, Pontius Pilate)
- Jesus' Beating
- Crucifixion/Physical Death (6 hours on a Friday – {9:00 AM – 3:00 PM})
- Resurrection (Rose on the 3rd day following His Crucifixion – Sunday AM)

What actually happened while Christ was dying on the Cross? What did Jesus' Death accomplish?

- Jesus physically died on the cross. The Romans were experts at killing criminals by crucifixion. The cross was their public deterrent to any aspect of society thinking about criminal activity. The Romans made the process of death by crucifixion public, gruesome, and agonizing. The individual actually died of asphyxiation, as the cross placed the lungs and especially the diaphragm in an awkward position where it could not function properly. In order to breathe, the crucified individual would have to pull themselves up on the spikes driven through their joints. This would continue

until the individual was exhausted and could no longer muster the strength to pull themselves up to a breathing position. At this point, the individual would die of asphyxiation. Everyone knows and understands that Jesus died physically but here's why this is important. There can be no resurrection from the dead without Christ first physically dying. His physical death is an incredibly important component of what transpired during these three days.

- As the appropriate sacrifice, God poured out His wrath on Christ & the sins of mankind were completely covered (this appeased God's justice & satisfied His Holiness).

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)

- Once people understand what this verse is saying and what it means, the results are life changing. Look close at what it says. The paraphrase of this verse is that God made Jesus, who had nothing to do with sin, to be sin on our behalf (That statement alone is incredibly good news!!) God makes Jesus to be sin and pours out His wrath on Jesus while He's on the Cross. In doing so, God's Holiness and Justice are satisfied. Then this is where things get really crazy. God doesn't stop with just having Jesus pay for our sins, He does way more. Look at the 2nd phrase in this verse. Look at what follows the words, "so that". Those who come to faith in Jesus Christ are gifted a righteousness that does not belong to them. They are given something that could never be earned. They are gifted with Christ's perfect, sinless righteousness. They have the very righteousness of God. Let me explain this as simply as I can. Let's say that you are in an auditorium full of people and Jesus suddenly walks into that place. He strolls to the front of the auditorium and instead of preaching a sermon or healing the sick, He calls you out of the crowd and asks you to join Him down front. He announces to the crowd that they are going to take a vote on who is more righteous, more Holy. The vote is between you and Jesus Himself. The crowd then decides who is more Holy – you or Jesus? How would you vote? The answer seems obvious – it's Jesus! If that's your answer, you would be wrong. The correct answer is that it's a tie, because you have the same exact righteousness as Jesus. Think for a moment what that means. You stand positionally before God with the status of being Holy, even though you are realistically, practically anything other than Holy. God has deemed you righteous because by faith you have believed in His Son, Jesus Christ.
- When Jesus died on the Cross, He atoned for the sins of mankind for all eternity. Here's an important thing about atonement - atonement is for God, not mankind. God and God alone decides whether Christ's blood is valuable enough to atone for a person's sins. God has deemed Christ's shed blood as fully able to cover all of mankind's sin. Jesus' shed blood fully atones for the sins of everyone. (Including yours & your worst moments!!)

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. (Gal 2:20)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus

were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶**We know that our old self was crucified with him** in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free^[b] from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** (Romans 6:1-11)

- Why are we crucified with Christ? In a supernatural way, when Christ died on the Cross, everyone who is a believer died with Him. Specifically, the sin part of us had to be killed. The sin nature/old self had to be completely destroyed. Understand that it could not be made over or given a spiritual touch up, but rather it was destroyed alongside Jesus. The old self had to die and something else had to be gifted to us in its place. In a supernatural way, the believer died w/Christ, was buried w/Christ, & was raised to a brand-new life (symbolism of baptism). In baptism, the church celebrates and symbolically displays this beautiful doctrine.
- For every person, who by grace through faith comes to Jesus Christ, those people are justified and found to be in a right relationship with God. The Great Judge has heard your case and deemed you blameless and guilt free because of the precious shed blood of His Son. Why is this important? In Jesus, the believer satisfies the justice of God.
- The beautiful good news of the Gospel is that the believer is saved from the punishment of sin (Rom 8:1). There is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!!! The beauty and goodness of God is that He doesn't stop there. The believer is not only free from the punishment of sin but also free from the power of sin (Rom 6:11-12). Sin no longer can rule over the believer. They have been set free from the dominion of sin and death.

What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection? What did Jesus accomplish by rising from the dead?

- Sin and Death are partners. Where you find one, you will always find the other. How would God tangibly prove that He had defeated sin and death? By rising from the dead!! The way He chose to do it was to die on a Cross and then rise from the dead on the 3rd day.
- Jesus' Resurrection is God's proof and thus gift to His church that they never have to doubt His power to overcome sin and death. Because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did, sin no longer enslaves people to its power. Because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did, the believer will never have to fear death. Death is NOT the end for the believer. Jesus has made a way for the believer to live with Him in Heaven forever.

I am the Way, the Truth, & the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

Important Takeaways for the Work of Christ:

- The work of Christ describes WHAT Christ did

- Jesus' work included making God known,
- Jesus' work also included accomplishing the will of His Father
- Jesus' work ultimately was to be the perfect sacrifice for sinful mankind.
 - Jesus sacrifice on the Cross is rooted in an understanding of 3 OT passages (Ex 12, Lev 4 & Lev 16)
 - The Biblical/Historical facts surrounding Jesus' death & resurrection (last supper, betrayal, trials, beatings, crucifixion, & resurrection)
 - An understanding of what Jesus' crucifixion accomplished
 - An understanding of what Jesus' resurrection accomplished

Response

The Bible teaches that while God does the saving of mankind, people bear a personal responsibility for their own lives. They bear the responsibility for every aspect of their lives. The Bible clearly speaks of a time when every person will stand before God and answer for their own lives. (2 Cor 5:10)

When people are presented with the Gospel, there is only one of two paths that people will take. One leads to life and flourishing in Jesus Christ while the other leads to an empty pursuit of looking for something that only Jesus can provide. In other words, people will either go the way of belief in Jesus which leads to Repentance or they will Reject the claims of Christ. In this section, the responses of Rejection and Repentance will be explored, which will give the reader an opportunity to look at some important implications of the Gospel.

Rejection

The Gospel NEVER leaves someone the same. When a person comes in contact with the Gospel, it will either draw a person closer to God or it will push them further away. For those who reject what God has offered in the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, they have banished themselves to a life of empty pursuits and an eternity separated from God in a place called Hell. As heartbreaking as this reality is, it serves as the Holy and Just judgment of God. Because of God's Justice, someone has to pay for the sins of an individual. Jesus has offered to stand in mankind's place but if people refuse that offer, they must answer and pay for their own sin.

- While it's true that the Gospel NEVER leaves people the same, it's also important to remember who bears the responsibility for the results of the Gospel. The results of the Gospel are God's responsibility and no one else. Here's why this is relieving. The pressure for sharing the Gospel is

removed from believers. The believer is NOT going to mess up sharing the Gospel. They are free to share with the world around them how much Jesus loves them. For those that the Gospel pushes further away, believers should NOT close the door on these relationships but rather continue to love and pray for these individuals. Who knows, God may yet save these people. The takeaway on people rejecting the Gospel is that the believer is NOT responsible for the results of sharing the Gospel, but rather is simply responsible to bear witness to what Christ has done.

- Beware of Moralism!! (the idea that morality can win over God's Love) Becoming a "good person" or a moral person is never the answer to mankind's sin problem. Jesus is the only answer to mankind's sin problem. Seeking a moral solution to our sin problem leaves people in one of two places: pride or despair. Some people believe they can in their own moral power win God's approval. This simply isn't true and leaves these individuals in a dangerous place. The other reaction is that people will come to the right conclusion that they can never be "good enough" and despair over their sinful state. This is why teaching/preaching w/out the Gospel is futile. This includes Bible study material (at all ages including children), that often teaches a brand of moralism. The teaching of simply "be good" damns people to the places of pride or despair. Teaching the Gospel rids the church of the problem of moralism.
- A life apart from Christ is a life of emptiness & empty pursuits. (Jeremiah 2) Why? Because a life apart from Christ is a life that leads people to pursue the desires of their hearts. Where does that lead people? To pursue idols of their own making and the end result of this is to be enslaved to sin. What does sin produce each and every time? DEATH!!! Sin only can produce death!! So the modern idea of pursuing the desires of the heart sounds positive but in reality leads to a life less than what it could be in Jesus Christ.
- Because sin can only produce death, this means that the Lost will NOT "have it all together". They may try to keep up the appearance of having it all together, but the reality is they & their lives will be a mess. Therefore, the church cannot be a religious club but rather a hospital for the spiritually sick. Believers should prepare their hearts and minds for this reality. Dealing with the Lost will be Messy!! Jesus Himself declared that He didn't come for the righteous but only for the sick (Matt 9:10-13)
- The Bible says that a natural person (someone who is Lost & apart from Christ) **cannot** appraise spiritual things. (1 Cor 2:14) This means that Lost people do NOT have the ability to see or value the beauty of Christ. They cannot understand or value what you have in Christ until Christ through faith works the miracle of salvation in their lives. In light of this, the believer should have a posture of love/concern for the Lost, **NOT judgment!!!**
- Related to the point of NOT judging the Lost for behaving/thinking like they're Lost - everyone is made in the image of God. Even as Lost, sin-loving, morally bankrupt individuals, people still bear the image of their Creator. Thus, they should be treated with an immense respect and dignity. Quick story: a group of female believers from the Village Church in Flower Mound, who were hairdressers, had a burden for some of their clients who were strippers. They began to go to the strip clubs and would minister to the women, love them where they were, and be some of the few people that treated them like human beings. As a result, seven of these ladies came to know Christ as their Savior.

- The churches that love the lost sincerely become magnets for the Lost. When people are genuinely loved in spite of themselves, they are attracted to those places. This is especially true for churches. The heart of Christ was to seek & save the Lost (Lk 19:10, Matt 25:29). This is true for everyone. Jesus didn't wait until people had their act together. Jesus loved them at their worst. (Rom 5:8) The heartbeat of the church should be to seek the Lost & let Christ save them through the power of the Gospel.
- When people reject what Christ has done on their behalf, when they reject his offer of eternal life, they will stand before God on the basis of their own righteousness. In doing this, they will be found lacking in what is necessary to be in right relationship with God. Since God is Holy & they are NOT, they will meet God's Justice.
- In the instance where a person stands before God on the basis of their own righteousness and found lacking, they will spend eternity in a place called Hell, separated from God forever.

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” (C.S. Lewis)

Repentance

The person who sees (at least vaguely) who they really are (sinner) in light of who God is (Holy, Loving, Just, etc), and believes/responds positively to the offer of God's grace and mercy in the person of Jesus Christ, will be forgiven of their sins forever. Repentance means that I have "changed my mind" about the direction of my life. The believer stops trusting in themselves and puts their faith and trust in what Jesus has offered. This marks the beginning of a change and even transformation that will mark this individual's life for the rest of their life - even into eternity.

- God values Life. It is the most precious gift that He gifted to mankind/creation. Through what Jesus has accomplished, God has now offered that precious gift for all of eternity. In Jesus, Eternal Life is exactly what we receive (Rom 6:23). In Jesus & Jesus alone is life!! Therefore, the believer's lifetime pursuit is to get more of Christ (Philippians 3:7-11)
- In Jesus, the believer is promised eternal life. Jesus accomplishes this for the believer through His work, the Holy Spirit seals it (guarantees it, Eph 1:13-14), and the believer gets to enjoy God forever because God has made the believer righteous forever. Have you ever thought about the main purpose of your life is to learn to enjoy God forever? Yet that's exactly what believers are to do with this life. What an incredible joy to lean into this beautiful truth!
- As a believer, I don't have an earned righteousness but rather a gifted one. It was Christ's righteousness that was gifted to the believer. This means there is no longer any condemnation for anyone who is saved (Rom 8:1). Here's why this is so important - guilt & shame should no longer serve as crippling agents in a believer's life. The penalty of every sin that has been committed or will be committed is completely, 100% paid for in the precious shed blood of Jesus Christ. The believer stands in right relationship with God based on the gifted righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the believer can approach the throne of grace with a confidence that could only be given by God Himself. (Heb 4:16) This reality leads to a freedom to pursue Jesus and the things of Jesus for the rest of their life.

- The believer must be discipled ("learned" & disciplined) to follow Jesus. The ultimate goal for the believer is to learn to enjoy God forever. Enjoying God forever does NOT wait until after you have died but rather begins in this life, as believers learn how to make much of Jesus. In all a believer does in life, the attempt should be to bring honor and glory to God. This lifetime process is called sanctification (to be "set apart" for the Holy pursuit of enjoying God).
- Because Jesus is the only source of life for the Believer, then every other thing apart from Christ will bring death. Anything that is put in place of Christ as our 1st love is idolatry. When a person comes to Christ through faith, that individual is saved from their sin for all eternity but not necessarily saved from the struggle with sin during this lifetime. To be clear, sin no longer has the ability to rule over a believer because of what Christ has accomplished. However, the struggle with sin will be an ongoing battle. The flesh will remain the believer's lifetime daily struggle. Because this is true, the believer will still deal with the consequences of sin even though they are free from the penalty of sin. In this, the reality remains that believers can be deceived to trust themselves (pride) and pursue other things in the hope that those things will bring life & flourishing (idolatry). So pride & idolatry will remain a constant struggle for all believers.
- Believers will "back-slide" and miss what Christ offers in 1 of 2 ways: Legalism or License.
 - **Legalism** = the attempt to impress or win-over God through morality. It usually adds rules that are NOT biblical in an attempt to earn "brownie points" with God. It is the antithesis of the Gospel. Rather than happily receiving what Christ has so graciously provided, it is the attempt to earn God's love.
 - **License** = the belief that since Christ has forgiven a believer for all of their sins, then there is no need to obey the things laid out in Scripture. It is the belief that sin doesn't matter because God has already forgiven the believer for everything and anything they have done. It also is the antithesis of the Gospel because it is an abuse of grace. It understands nothing about what it means to pursue the inexhaustible joy found in Christ rather than things of this world (which only bring death).
- When people by grace through faith receive what Christ has done for them, they will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ and his gifted righteousness. They will stand before God Holy & blameless because they will be bearing Jesus' righteousness. They will be in eternal fellowship with God based on this truth. God will be both Holy & Just to allow them into His presence because Jesus earned that right on their behalf.
- The believer will spend eternity in Heaven with God, angels, and fellow believers because of the great love with which God loved us. (John 3:16)

A Few Other Implications of the Gospel:

- The Gospel is the Power of God unto Salvation (Rom 1:16) If there's no Gospel presented, then there will be no salvation. This is one reason that things like missions and evangelism are important. If the lost don't hear the gospel, they will not be saved. (Rom 10:9-15)

- Since people are gifted with the Righteousness of Jesus, then the believer gains freedom from the power of Sin. Sin no longer masters the believer because of what Christ accomplished. (Rom 6:14) Practically what does this mean for the believer? There are two main things that will now distinguish the believer's life:
 - The end of shame & guilt – There are many believers who are marred by the sins and mistakes of their past. It's those moments in life that come to define people. They can never get past what they did. They can never forgive themselves for that moment/moments when they were less than the standard they had set for themselves. When any good thing happens in life, there is this tingling in the back of their mind, this less than subtle reminder that they are not worthy of anything good. When Christ saves us, He also saves us from ourselves and the wreck and mess of our past. Those moments, those glaring mistakes and sins no longer have dominion over you. In Christ, those sins have been paid in full. When Satan accuses you of the mistakes of your past, your Heavenly Father's response is, "those sins have been paid in full by the blood of My Son."
 - The end of the fear of "messing things up" – There is a glorious, beautiful truth to the Gospel. There is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1) That means you will NEVER have to pay the penalty for your sin. This glorious truth can be abused in license, but the right perspective of the Gospel frees a person to truly live for the first time. The reality is that a believer can NOT "mess things up" ultimately or eternally. The charge and the challenge is to live in the beauty of what Jesus has provided. What Jesus has provided is freedom. (Gal 5:1)
- What happens when a believer sins? What does Sin do to the believer's life? The reality is that the life & work of Christ have freed the believer from the power of sin but not the consequences of sin in this life. Sin has no bearing on the believer's eternal life. However, the consequences of sin remains very real. While sin and death have been conquered, they remain as realities in this life. When believer's sin, they are "inviting" death into their lives. They are courting things that will bring destruction to them and those around them. Sin is always a problem of the heart. The heart issue, at the most basic level, is that sin is the pursuit and belief that somehow an idol will bring life and flourishing. The reality is that only Jesus can do that.
- This begs the question how should sin be handled? There are 3 things that should be a regular part of a believer's life.
 - Confession – The air the believer breathes should be confession & repentance. This should be the daily, regular practice of every believer. There is always the option to confess your sins to God. This is a good and right practice but there's also a caution. Many believers think that a confession to God is all that's necessary. That no one else needs to know about the dark moments of that believer's life. Sin that remains in the dark is a problem that tends to fester and grow in a believer's soul. Unless this sin is brought out into the light, out into the open, then it will never be dealt with adequately. (Eph 5:6-17)
 - Authentic Openness – Since sin grows in the dark, the best remedy for sin is exposing that sin to others. Why? Because sin's power is to remain hidden, where it isolates its' victim and does its' main damage in isolation. Remember sin brings death and does most of its' damage in private, therefore exposing that sin to others does away with its' power. So

confessing sins to one another is a good practice for believers. (James 5:16) Think about what this means. Part of the reason a believer needs a church and thus community is so that sin does not isolate and harm them. So believers have to get past the fear of “what will people think of me, if they know _____ about me?” **Every believer and I mean every believer struggles with sin.** Rather than belittling people who sin or making them feel bad about whatever sin they are struggling with, the church should be the first place people run to for help. Therefore, there should be a discipline and willingness to ask for help from other believers. ***** (Note: Men should confess their sins to other men & women should confess their sins to other women who are also believers.)**

- Mortification – Mortification is a fancy sounding theological term that means to “kill sin”. Most believers are decent about vivification (things that bring “life” – things like bible study, prayer, fasting, singing, etc.) I don’t know many believers who practice mortification – the killing of sin. Killing sin is a team sport. Mortification is done in community with other believers, with whom the believer regularly practices confession and authentic openness. Killing sin takes place when believers hold each other accountable to one another for what they have confessed to each other. As believers in community, they help each other discover the root causes of their regular & habitual sin. By discovering the roots of sin, it helps to determine how to kill it. By making this a regular practice in the life of a church, the church is practicing things that make for greater health.
- Where should the Gospel lead the believer? The Westminster Catechism says that the main purpose (“the chief end”) in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. What a beautiful truth!! The Gospel should always lead the believer to Worship!! In recognition of all the Gospel means, the believer should spend their lives making much of Jesus. There is no other possibility once a person recognizes what God has provided them in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Where you find people genuinely worshipping God, you will find the Gospel is central to everything they do.
- What should one do with their life? The Bible has much to say about this, but the bottom line is that believers place their full trust in where God leads. (Psalm 23, Prov 3:5-6) As they follow the Lord, they are to make much of Jesus in everything they do (1 Cor 10:31)
- **We want to make Jesus and Jesus alone the Hero of CBF.** There will be more specific things said about this in the future.

Gospel Implications for the Church:

The Gospel also has implications for the Church. The church is a collection of individuals who have been redeemed by Jesus. There is the universal church, which includes everyone who has been redeemed in the past, those in the present, and even those yet to be redeemed but will be at some point in the future. However, most of the time when the term church is used, it refers to a local group of believers. This means that this will pertain to Community Bible Fellowship as well.

What are Jesus’ marching orders for the church? To make Disciples (Matt 28:19-20) Since this was Jesus’ primary command for the church, let’s ask some relevant questions – things to think about:

- Why did Jesus seem less concerned with making Christians than He was making disciples?
- How is CBF doing at making Disciples?
- What is a disciple? How would you know if you've made one? What is the correlation between the Gospel and making Disciples?
- After answering the last few questions, what would have to change at CBF in order to make this a reality? What would stay the same?
- What would be some indicators that CBF would use to measure how well you are doing at making disciples?

There's a series of books put out by a group called 9Marks, which are written to help churches organize themselves around the truths of God's Word. One of the books is called, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* by Thabiti Anyabwile. The book has 10 chapters that are a good summation of not only what makes a healthy church member, but also demonstrates how and where a church should be placing its' efforts. Here are the 10 chapters:

- Mark 1 a Healthy Church Member is an Expository Listener – Expository Listening = “listening for the meaning of a passage of scripture and accepting that meaning as the main idea to be grasped for our personal and corporate lives as Christians.” (p.20)
- Mark 2 a Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Theologian
- Mark 3 a Healthy Church Member is Gospel Saturated
- Mark 4 a Healthy Church Member is Genuinely Converted
- Mark 5 a Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Evangelist
- Mark 6 a Healthy Church Member is a Committed Member
- Mark 7 a Healthy Church Member seeks Discipline – Every church needs two types of discipline: (1) formative discipline & (2) corrective discipline. More about this at a later time.
- Mark 8 a Healthy Church Member is a Growing Disciple
- Mark 9 a Healthy Church Member is a Humble Follower
- Mark 10 a Healthy Church Member is a Prayer Warrior

In the same way that the Gospel helps to form the individual believer, it also helps to form and guide the entire church. **For a church to be effective, it must learn how to make the Gospel central to all of its endeavors.**

Future Hope

The hope of every believer is ultimately in the Future that Jesus has both secured, through His life and work, and also promised to those who come to Him through faith. That secured and promised future hope is an eternal life with God. To be clear, the greatness of the future hope is not that believers get to spend eternity in paradise. The greatness of the future hope is that they get to spend eternity with God

Himself. (Rev 21:1-4) The future hope of the believer isn't a destination or locations. The future hope of the believer is an eternity with God.

In this world, is trouble and hardship for the believer. In this life, is also heartache and difficulty but Jesus has promised a future without these things. Jesus brings peace even amid the tribulations of the world.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

While Jesus is the oasis in the middle of the desert, He is also promising a future where tribulation, pain, and even death no longer exist. This is the ultimate hope of the believer. There will be an eternal future where Jesus' eternal reign is marked by peace, beauty and the absence of the fallout of sin. This hope is what propels the believer to endure and even find joy in the most difficult events and circumstances.

There are 3 aspects that best cover the topic of the Future Hope promised in Jesus Christ. Let's look at all three:

Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God has to first be defined. The Kingdom of God is essentially **the eternal rule of God** over everything. Since God is Sovereign, there is literally nothing over which He does not have total control. In the Bible, the terms "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" are interchangeable. They mean the same thing. When these terms are used, the scripture is primarily concerned with how God rules.

Like any kingdom, God's Kingdom is ruled by a King. This King is the Lord Jesus Christ. King Jesus is at the center of everything to do with the Kingdom of God. God chose to bestow this glory on His Son because of the mission that God ordained and Jesus accomplished. He preached the Kingdom of God and then lived out the reality of this Kingdom amongst a people that desperately needed Him. Jesus communicated that the Kingdom of God was encroaching on history. If you will, Jesus was preaching that the Kingdom of God was invading enemy held territory with the intent to save the lost and set captives free. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus begins His earthly ministry by fulfilling Isaiah and announcing the theme of His ministry in Matthew 4:17

¹²Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,

and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (Matt 4:12-17)

Be honest for a moment: If you were asked to explain the Kingdom of God, could you do it? Outside of the knowledge in the previous paragraphs, what else do you know about God’s Kingdom? The church’s knowledge regarding the Kingdom of God is usually either very confused or nonexistent. So, is this even an important subject? In other words, how important is it to know anything about the Kingdom of God? Let’s start here – what subject did Jesus talk about during His earthly ministry more than any other? And it’s not even close! If you guessed the Kingdom of God, you are correct. If Jesus thought it was so important to talk about this more than any other topic, then maybe the church should work to have a better understanding of it.

To better understand the Kingdom of God and its’ implications, there’s a need to understand how it impacts time. The New Testament refers to the Kingdom of God in terms of two remaining periods: (1) the present age; (2) the age to come.

Creation-----{Cross & Resurrection}-----{2nd Coming of Christ}-----Eternity

- Present Age – Referencing the timeline above, the present age marks the time prior to Christ’s 2nd Coming. This is the age in which everyone is currently living. This age is marked by Satan’s dominion over the world, his dark/sinful influence, and is also the time when the Kingdom of God is initiated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
- Age to Come – this is the time after Christ’s 2nd Coming, when Christ will begin the process of restoring everything and making it right for all of eternity. The Age to Come is the eternal time period, where the enemies of God are defeated for eternity (Satan, his forces, and the last enemy to fall is Death itself). Those who have been saved by faith will spend eternity with God. The Kingdom of God is eternal because it signifies God’s eternal reign.

The Kingdom of God is often referred to as the “Already but Not Yet” Kingdom. The Kingdom has been initiated in this present evil age but not yet fully realized. It won’t be fully realized until after the return of Jesus which begins the age to come. In other words, the Kingdom of God is a present reality for the church and at the same time a future treasure that awaits the redeemed.

God’s rule is an eternal reality, and He has chosen to not only include believers in His Kingdom but also to adopt them into His family and make them joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:12-17, Gal 4:1-7). God planned from the beginning of the world to create everything, be betrayed, endure sinful mankind, suffer, die, rise from the dead, ascend to Heaven, and be glorified eternally all to give the whole thing away to His redeemed, adopted children. That’s wild!!! If that isn’t a cause for worship, I don’t know what is.

“Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Since this Kingdom is “already but not yet”, there is a present reality for the church. Believers serve the One, True King and His Kingdom but do so in enemy territory. This world is currently the property of Satan and his organized, evil empire. (Eph 6:12) The Kingdom of God in this present evil age is at war.

- Side Note: This is NOT meant to confuse you. In an effort to be crystal clear, let’s correct a possible misconception about the last paragraph. While it’s true that the Kingdom of God is at war, the outcome has already been decided. God is Sovereign and all-powerful. The outcome of this war was NEVER in doubt. There is a heresy (false teaching) called Manicheism. Manicheism teaches that there is a force for good and an equal force for evil. Those two forces are battling for the universe and the outcome is undecided. That’s simply NOT true!! Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection proved the outcome of this war has already been decided.

Because of sin, the Enemy has gained control of this world. For the time, God has allowed this. At the perfect time (Gal. 4:4), God invaded this present evil age. Instead of sending in battalions of angelic forces, He invaded this present evil age with a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Jesus’ incarnation was God’s declaration that He was taking back this world. While that night was confusing for Joseph, Mary, and a group of shepherds, there was no doubt what was taking place. God had come for what was His!!

How did Jesus fight the enemy? By preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, and casting out demons! Look at these verses:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand**; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15)

²²Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” ²⁴But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” ²⁵Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matt 12:22-32)

Notice Matthew 12:28-29: Can you accurately interpret these two verses?

- Let's take verse 28 first. What does it mean? The casting out of demons is a clear indication that the Kingdom of God has come. The Kingdom of God is a reality that the Age to Come has invaded this present evil age. The Kingdom has been revealed by reclaiming enemy territory. The demon-possessed no longer belong to the Enemy.
- It's verse 29 that's the clincher. To understand what this verse is teaching, a person first has to identify and define the terms in this verse. Who's the "strong man" in this verse? What does the strong man's house represent? Who's the one who binds the strong man and plunders his house?

Let's take them one at a time.

- Strong Man = Satan
- Strong Man's house = His evil kingdom in this present evil age. In other words, this world in which we live.
- The one "breaking & entering" the strong man's house to do a little plundering = Jesus!!

It's strange to see Jesus speak of Himself as the one that is breaking and entering another's home. Here's the reality - Jesus did not come to the Earth to play nice! He came to usher in the Kingdom of God by seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to be the difference maker for mankind that man could never be for themselves.

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom like no other. It does not react or pursue the obvious. It does not fight in natural ways. It takes the "upside down" approach to being a kingdom. Look in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Every time a verse begins with "you have heard it said...", Jesus is about to explain an "upside down" aspect of the Kingdom. It's the kingdom that doesn't hand out brownie points because a person lusts instead of physically committing adultery. It's the kingdom that doesn't retaliate against someone that has wronged them. It's the kingdom that goes the extra mile and gives people the coat off of their back. It's the kingdom that prays for the well-being of their enemies. **It's the kingdom that is counterculture in every aspect.** This is still true today. This will always be the case. Society and culture at large will believe untrue things because they cannot appraise spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14). They are easy prey for the Enemy and will easily be deceived. The Truth of God will run counter to the wisdom of this age.

Part of the role of the church is to see people transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into citizens of the Kingdom of God (Eph 2:19-22). The only way that people are transformed in this way is to give them a steady diet of the Gospel. The tragedy in most churches today is that they see themselves as religious clubs dispensing Christian consumer goods and services to the masses, rather than a community of Kingdom citizens. The difference between the two is Heaven and Hell, disciples loyal to King Jesus or spoiled consumers demanding their way.

Important Takeaways for the Kingdom of God:

- Kingdom of God = God's eternal rule over everything
- Like other kingdoms, this one is ruled by a king. The One & Only King Jesus!!

- The Kingdom of God is understood in terms of time – 2 ages: (1) Present evil age; (2) The Age to Come
- The Kingdom of God is referred to as “The Already but Not Yet” Kingdom
- The incarnation of Jesus was God’s invasion of this present evil age and this world, which is enemy occupied.
- The Kingdom of God is an “upside down” Kingdom. It will always be counterculture to the “wisdom” of the day.

Restoration

When Jesus’ comes back and makes His 2nd appearing, It will be to restore all things & set everything right for Eternity. His 2nd coming will not be like His 1st. He will not be returning once again to save people from their sins but rather as the Righteous Judge that will make everything right again.

God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. At some point, mankind rebelled against God by sinning. When mankind sinned, death entered the world and fractured creation irrevocably. This is a strange thought, but mankind has never seen creation as God intended. This world, as beautiful as it is, is not the way it was before sin. C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Great Divorce*, which is an allegory about the difference between Heaven and Hell. At one point, Lewis imagines that the grass in Heaven would hurt a modern person to walk on it because it was sharp and unfazed by sin. Lewis goes on to describe Heaven and even the New Earth as being a “more real” version than the one in which mankind lives. Undoubtedly, there is an aspect of creation that is broken. The Bible communicates that creation knows this about itself. The Bible says that creation is groaning, awaiting the Day of the Lord. Creation longs for the day when the King will return and set everything right again. There will be a day when the last person is saved and the King will return. On that day, creation will be freed from the bondage of the futility of sin’s effects. (Rom 8:19-22)

Part of the way that Jesus will make things right again will be to gather those that belong to Him. When He returns, Jesus will sit on His glorious throne and gather the nations to Himself. He will separate the nations into two groups (sheep & goats) – those that belong to Him and those who decided to do life their way and as a result stand before the great Judge based on their own sin-stained righteousness. (Matt 25:31-46; Rev 20:11-15)

The Bible also says that every believer will receive a 2nd judgment. This judgment is NOT to determine their eternal destination because that has already been determined. The 2nd judgment will deal with the rewards surrounding how they lived their lives. Their deeds (both good and bad) will be judged. (Matt 12:36-37, Rom 14:10-12, 2 Cor 5:10)

Jesus 2nd Coming is the inauguration of the end of the “Not Yet” phase of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus returns, not only will He be setting things right but He will be ending the present evil age and moving those that belong to Him into eternity or as it is currently known, the Age to Come.

Important Takeaways for Restoration:

- Jesus’ 2nd Coming will be to restore all things and set everything right for all eternity
- Creation will be set free from the futility of sin
- Jesus will gather all of the redeemed that belong to Him
- Jesus 2nd Coming is the inauguration of the Age to Come

Eternity

Eternity is a long time! It’s a term that gets thrown around a good deal in church, but I wonder how many people have actually taken the time to think about how long eternity really is. In essence, eternity is the end of time. Time is finite and something that God created for the benefit of mankind. When eternity begins, time ends. The Bible says that to God a single day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day (2 Pet. 3:8). In other words, time is irrelevant to God. He is not limited or mastered by time in the way that mankind is. That’s hard to imagine because all mankind knows is being a slave to the clock. Yet, eternity is the end of the need for a calendar or clock.

God is good and He is good all the time. The good God has decided to give those who belong to Him eternal life. What a gift! What grace that God has so loved His own! Here’s something that gets asked in church from time to time: what will believers do for all of eternity? How will all of that time (can’t think of it in other terms) be used? I don’t think anyone can answer this question definitively. Scripture does not answer what will happen with all of that time. The things it does communicate about eternity in Heaven are significant. Here are a few of those things:

- There will be a New Heaven & a New Earth
- It will mean the end of many things like sad tears, mourning, crying, & pain. Those are things from this present evil age and by this time they will be former things that belonged to another age (Rev 21:4)
- There will be no temple. No need for one since God Himself is there.
- There will be no sun. No need for one since the glory of God will illuminate everything.
- There will be no night. God’s glory will illuminate everything Himself for all eternity.
- There will no more Death!!!! The One who died in our place and rose from the dead has seen to the end of that! Death will be the last enemy of God thrown into a lake of fire for all eternity. (Rev 20:14)

In eternity, the believer will receive a new body as well (1 Cor 15:35-58). The Bible says that the natural, perishable body cannot inherit eternity (1 Cor 15:50). This “perishable” body that people now possess is

not fit for eternity. 2 Cor 5 describes the physical body as a tent that causes the believer to groan, wishing for something better, more durable, eternal (2 Cor 5:2-4). This body is frail and weak. It deteriorates as a person ages – another sign of the curse of sin. The eternal body is not like the natural body that people now have. At the time of the 2nd coming of Christ, the dead will rise with their new eternal bodies and those still living will be transformed to a new body in the “twinkling of an eye”. The new eternal bodies will be bodies fit for eternity. They will not perish. They will not break. They will not feel pain. They will be exactly what is needed to spend an eternity with God Himself.

There’s just one more thing to discuss. This seems like a fitting end to the document on Theological Foundation and something that is important to everyone. What happens to loved ones that have passed away? One of the reasons the Apostle Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians was to deal with this topic. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul addresses the death of loved ones:

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,^[a] that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so **we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)**

Notice several things about this passage:

- His stated purpose for this section of Scripture is so that the believers in this church would grieve their loved ones properly – with hope!
- Why would they have hope in the loss of a loved one? This hope is based in the person and work of Jesus (1 Thess 4:14)
- Then the dead believer has a role in the 2nd coming of Jesus. They precede those who are still alive in joining Jesus in the air to march in victoriously. Then those still alive will also join Jesus in the air.
- Why does Paul bring up this sequence of events about Jesus 2nd Coming? What is Paul’s purpose in mentioning this sequence of future events? Remember the context of the verse is to deal with how believers grieve with hope. This future sequence of events is described because it will be the first time that the believers who are alive will be reunited with their loved ones who have previously died, not to mention being with Jesus for the first time. What a moment!
- Notice verse 17 – There’s 3 important truths in the last phrase (“we will always be with the Lord”):
 - Who’s “we” in this verse? The answer comes from the context of verse 17 itself. Notice earlier in the verse, it states, “then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them...” Who’s “them” in this verse? The loved ones who had already died. So when the last phrase of verse 17 references “we”, it means both the loved ones who had already

passed away and the current living believers. We = all living believers and their believing loved ones who had already passed away.

- How long will all of us (believers living & dead) be with Jesus? ALWAYS!!! Like forever & ever!! Like for all of eternity!!
- Who do “we” spend eternity with? The Lord. Not only do we get to spend eternity with believing loved ones but more importantly, we get to spend eternity with our Lord and Savior.

How incredible is it that God saw fit to place this truth in Scripture. God did not leave this question unanswered. He made it crystal clear that if people’s loved ones who have passed are believers, then all believers will spend eternity together with Jesus Himself. That’s a beautiful truth with which to end this document.

Here’s a good place to remind people of an important truth. This truth will be phrased in the form of a question. If you could spend eternity with all of your loved ones (living and dead) and have all of the benefits of Heaven but would do so without Jesus, would you still want all of that? Without Jesus, the things that He has promised – things like eternal life, Heaven, being with loved ones forever, and every good thing – does NOT make any sense. It would not work without the One who provided eternal life. If a believer could do any of this without Jesus, they shouldn’t want those things. Here’s why this point is raised. Believers should be cautious because anything, even good things, can be made into idols. The longing to spend eternity with loved ones should never replace the desire to spend eternity with Jesus.

Important Takeaways for Eternity:

- Eternity is the end of time.
- Biblical characteristics of Eternity (New Heaven/New Earth, no tears, no pain, no temple, no sun, NO DEATH)
- Believers will be given a new eternal body
- Believers will be reunited with loved ones who have passed away
- Most importantly, believers will spend eternity with Jesus

This document is not a comprehensive, systematic theology but rather something that is intended to point out both what the gospel is and how important it is to everything pertaining to the Christian faith. This document is meant to serve as a foundation of Biblical truth that will allow CBF to springboard off it into glorious and beautiful things that God has in store for this church.