

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Gospel Centrality



1 INTRODUCTION TO GOSPEL CENTRALITY

Mary was struggling. Where did it go wrong and why was she feeling this way? She remembered back to just a couple of years ago when she first became a believer. Her life was a mess and her sister invited her to church. There, she connected with people and was able to share her struggles with people who really cared. They taught her that her greatest need was Jesus and when she finally prayed to accept Him as her Savior, the weight of her life came off her shoulders. It was such a joyful time.

But, fast-forward to today and it all seems so burdensome. She wants to read her Bible more regularly but with small kids, a full-time job, and all the tasks that go into caring for her home, it's really hard to find the time. Her church friends keep telling her she's not praying enough and not trusting God enough, but she's trying to do the best she can. She just feels like her best is never good enough. She knows that God must be really disappointed in her. And feeling that condemnation makes everything really hard. It's hard to go to church to hear another sermon where her faults are going to be pointed out. It's hard to read the Bible because she's afraid of finding another area where she's not doing enough. And considering all the times she losses it with the kids and her husband, she just feels like a big fat failure! If only she could go back to the feeling she had when she was first saved and it was all new. But the pressures of life and the demands of Christianity make that time seem so distant and unattainable. What can she do to feel better again?

Many, many Christians find themselves in similar places to Mary. Perhaps you really identified with her as you read her story. And although the situation seems difficult, the truth is, the answer is NOT hard. We firmly believe that life can be and MUST be different from Mary's experience and the differences come when Mary has a change in her daily perspective. And that is possible as Mary lives in the very gospel that has saved her. We believe the way the Bible teaches the Christian life is missed by many. If we can live life with the gospel in the center, we will find ourselves daily in the JOY and HOPE it brings!

2 WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

READ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

- 🗒 What does Paul highlight as elements of the Gospel?

Jesus died on the cross for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day defeating the power of death. Jesus then appeared to many and ascended into heaven. This truth, when we believe it, has massive implications for every area of my life. The Gospel is not just true to save me from my sin. The gospel has the power to help me grow and change. We don't leave the Gospel in the rear view mirror after our salvation. Instead, it becomes the motivation for living a life honoring to the Lord.

3 THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL:

- 🗒 What is your understanding of what "Gospel Centrality" means?

Let's look at some key principles to unpack what the Bible has to say about the concept of Gospel-Centrality.

4 THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE

READ Luke 24:25-27

When Jesus says “Moses and the Prophets,” it is another way of Him saying The Old Testament, since Moses wrote the first five books and the Prophets wrote many of the others.

🔗 What did Jesus show the disciples?

🔗 What does that say about how we should read the Old Testament?

The main storyline of Scripture is Jesus. The Bible isn't about us. It was written to us but not about us. We must guard ourselves from reading the Bible as though it is all about us.

I make the Bible about me when:

- I approach the Bible for things to know rather than a Savior to love.
- I approach the Bible for a list of rules to obey rather than a Savior to serve.
- I approach the Bible for fixes to my problems rather than a Savior who solved my problem.
- When we open the Bible and aren't looking for Jesus and we are not seeking to understand scripture in the way God intended us to understand it.

Let's unpack that a bit further with this next point.

5 THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

The main theme and message of the Bible is the Gospel. The Bible does speak to other things, it tells us how to live and act, it tells us some history of Christianity, it speaks to many things.

That is not to say that in speaking of the Gospel being the central message of the Bible, that the Gospel is the only thing the Bible speaks of. But the lens by which we must understand and view scripture is through the Gospel.

Because of that truth the Gospel becomes absolutely essential for your spiritual growth. The Bible usually does not give us the IMPERATIVE, the commands, the do this and don't do this, without the INDICATIVE, the why you should do this.

Imperative - (demands) giving an authoritative command;

Indicative - (motives) denoting a mood of verbs expressing simple statement of a fact.

So to state it more simply very few times in scripture do we find a command to obey outside of a motivation for the obedience. God wants more than just your outward obedience, He wants the internal reality of your heart to be such that you desire to obey Him because you love Him.

Dane Ortlund said:

"We move forward in discipleship not mainly through pep talks and stern warnings. We move forward when we hear afresh the strangeness of grace, relaxing our hearts and loosening our clenched hold on a litany of lesser things—financial security, the perfect spouse, career advancement, sexual pleasure, human approval, and so on."

So we see over and over in scripture that indicatives (motives) fuel imperatives (commands).

That happens in two primary ways:

A. DIRECT GOSPEL CONNECTIONS

Consider the book of Ephesians.

There are 41 Imperatives in the book. Only one of those imperatives comes in the first 3 chapters and it is the command to remember in 2:11. The first three chapters are all a deep explanation of the Gospel.

Then how does Paul start chapter 4? "I therefore..." In other words, because of all of the truth that I have just told you, now here is what that looks like. To approach chapter 4, 5, and 6 without chapters 1-3 is to miss Paul's point and motivation for how to accomplish those things.

Even without that foundation Paul gives some really clear indicatives driving the imperatives example in chapters 4-6

Husbands, do you need to love your wife better?

Ephesians 5:25-26

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,"

We all need to be humble but what's our motivation?

Philippians 2:3-8

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Wondering why you should give to the church?

2 Corinthians 9:7

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

But look what it connects back to a few verses earlier:

2 Corinthians 8:9

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

READ Ephesians 4:32

🗒️ What should be your motivation for forgiving others?

Over and over and over those connections of indicative to imperative are made in direct gospel connections. But it's not just direct gospel connections but connections that use what we call “Gospel Language.”

B. GOSPEL LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS

Gospel language connections are not direct Gospel statements, but instead language that describes the Gospel or describe God as a saving God.

Consider a few examples.

Struggling to trust that God is working for your good?

Romans 8:28-30

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Justification is Biblical language used to describe the point in time when salvation was applied to you.

How about the Ten Commandments?

Exodus 20:1-2

“And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

What about Deuteronomy 6 – one of the most quoted verses about raising kids?

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

What do I tell my kids about this when they ask?

Deuteronomy 6:20-21

“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’”

Gospel connections are all over scripture. The Gospel fuels your obedience.

Bobby Jameison said:

“The gospel is so central to sanctification, that the indicative grounds the imperative, and that we don't move beyond the gospel but deeper into the gospel. These are all deeply biblical arguments.”

This is true because in order for our behavior to change, our affections have to change. Our heart has to be stirred to move and serve God in order for actual life change to happen. It's not enough to simply say, “I don't want to want the things of the world anymore.” We have to say I don't want the things of the world AND replace the desire for the things of the world with a desire and affection for Jesus.

This paradigm of Scripture exists because it's not enough to will ourselves to serve God. God is after your heart and for our hearts to be won by God, they have to be enamored with the Gospel. We change our behavior by the Gospel changing our hearts.

🔗 What are you doing in your life right now to try and change your behavior without changing your heart?

- ① What things have your heart captured with something other than the amazing message of your redemption in Jesus?
- ① Are you reading the Bible looking for Jesus or looking for behavior modification?

Don't read the Bible and miss the God of that Bible.

6 THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD

For us to truly embrace the Gospel, it has to become a worldview for us. What do we mean by that? A worldview is a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.

The Gospel has to become the lens for which we view life, make decisions, parent, work, love our spouses, volunteer at our kid's school, see our retirement, view the things we have, etc. The Gospel needs to be the lens for our life because it is the lens through which we are called to see God, and God defines what life is and how it should go.

Dane Ortlund gave this example:

"Think about what we mean when we call people "self-centered." We don't mean that all they think about directly is themselves. They also think about what to eat, what to wear, how to conclude an email, and a thousand other things each day. But self informs all these other decisions. A self-centered person passes all he does and thinks through the filter of self. Self trumps everything else and orders all other loves accordingly."

A Gospel worldview means all of life is viewed in light of the gospel. Everything passes through the filter of the gospel.

Consider how a Gospel worldview impacts the way I parent.

The Gospel tells me that I don't own my kids because God owns them. So, I am no longer an owner parent but instead I am called to be an ambassador parent, a parent who speaks and shows the love of Christ to my kids. I don't have to parent from the perspective of needing anything from my kids or requiring things of my kids because I have all of my satisfaction in Jesus.

My kid's behavior doesn't change my standing before God. The sports my kids play doesn't have a bearing on my eternal security. As an ambassador parent I am free to allow my kids to be who the Lord has created them to be because I don't need anything from them.

🔗 How does a Gospel worldview impact the use of your time, treasure and talents?

I have to consider that Jesus became poor for me, He stepped out of the riches of heaven to a world plagued and marred by sin which is the complete opposite of who He is. When I view my home, my cars, my time, and my talents from the perspective of “everything I have already belongs to God and He sacrificed so much for me” of course my home will be a place where I minister to others. Of course I will meet the needs of others with my time and talents. Of course I will serve the Bride of Christ, His church, with those things. He became nothing for me.

You see, Gospel thinking should impact every relationship, every decision, every area of my life. No part of my life should be untouched by the Gospel. The Gospel literally has implications for every single thing in my life.

🔗 Do you view the world through a gospel lens?

🔗 Do you think often about the Gospel and how it should impact your relationships and other facets of your life?

The Gospel leads us to God. It leads us to a life of freedom in Christ. It leads us to a life of joyful obedience. It leads us to a place of self-forgetfulness and service towards others. It leads us to a place of openness and growth.

The Gospel is our greatest hope. It's our greatest joy. It's our greatest motivator. It pleads our case before a holy God. The Gospel is amazing. The Gospel is the power for everything we do.

🗒 After considering this entire lesson, how would you define Gospel-centrality?

🗒 How will this impact your thinking?